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ABSTRACT

This book is specifically written for dyslexic or learning disabled individuals seeking insight into their disorder and its effects on their lives. The material is divided into 52 chapters, which are written expressly so that they will not be intimidating to learning disabled individuals. The chapters are drawn from issues that the author is asked about most frequently from his lectures, the support groups he facilitates, and his correspondence with learning disabled adults. The chapters are not intended to provide specific answers to individual issues, but rather to facilitate making decisions about these issues. The author contends that dyslexic individuals spend too much time avoiding certain situations. The mere anticipation of being requested to read, write and spell causes many to launch into a defense cycle, which results in a lack of participation in things that could be beneficial. Selective chapters include: "Self-Esteem," "Job-Seeking Skills," "Finding a Tutor," "Starting a Support Group," "Parenting an LD Child," "Picking a Therapist," "Advocating for Yourself," "The Ability to Change," "Assertiveness: The Express Lane," "Responsible to Self," and "Learning to See Further." (GCP)

Too Much Time on Sycamore Street:

A Self-Help Resource for
Adolescents and Adults
with Learning Disabilities

By James J. Bauer

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**A Self-Help Resource for
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By James J. Bauer

Too Much Time on Sycamore Street

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4:

Dedicated to my children
Jon and Jessica Bauer

**"I never let school interfere
with my education."**

Mark Twain

About the Author

In 1969 James J. Bauer graduated from high school, reading, writing and spelling at less than a third grade level. His goal at graduation was to attend college. However, he was informed by his high school counselor that he would never be able to get into any college and, if by some mishap he would get in, he would flunk out in his first semester.

Determined to further his education, he applied to a technical school and was accepted into the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program. His instructors could not understand why he did so well in some parts of the program, but could not spell the simplest medical technology words. At that time James did not have an answer for them. Later after graduating from the program, he was evaluated and learned that he was severely dyslexic. Following a five-year period of tutoring, he was able to bring his reading up to a college level. James now holds a masters degree in human development from St. Mary's University of Minnesota. He is a Registered Occupational Therapist in private practice in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

Today, James lives in Fridley Minnesota with his wife, Molly, and their two children. His first book, *The Runaway Learning Machine: Growing Up Dyslexic*, was published by Educational Media Corporation in 1992.

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Introduction

This book is specifically written from one dyslexic person to other dyslexic or learning disabled individuals. However, individuals without learning disabilities may also find it beneficial. The material is divided into 52 chapters—one chapter for each week of the year. This will allow ample time for you to read each chapter and to reflect upon its content. This book is also intended not to be intimidating to learning disabled individuals. It may be used in one of three ways:

1. The traditional way of reading—from cover to cover.
2. Pick a topic which pertains specifically to you.
3. A group reading of one chapter at a time. Following the reading, the group reflects upon what has been read.

To understand the title of this book, *Too Much Time on Sycamore Street*, please read Chapter 5.

The 52 chapters are drawn from issues that I am asked about most frequently from my lectures, the support groups I facilitate, and my correspondence with LD adults. The 52 chapters are not intended to be specific answers to individual issues; however, they will hopefully facilitate making some conclusions about these issues.

Please note that in the book I use the terms “dyslexia” and “learning disability” or “LD.” For all practical purposes, these terms are interchangeable when reading this book.

Chapter 1

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is certainly a major player when one is living with dyslexia or a learning disability. However, my theory of self-esteem varies from most of the other theories of self-esteem. I know that my particular theory flies in the face of the so-called experts, but it is my theory and it works for me.

I hypothesize that approximately ten percent of the adult population has good self-esteem all of the time. I further hypothesize that ten percent of the adult population has bad self-esteem all of the time. The remaining eighty percent of us drift in and out of good and bad self-esteem, depending on the particular circumstances of the day, or even how we may be feeling physically on that day.

On certain days you wake up feeling that you can handle any problem the world chooses to send your way. On other days the slightest thing that may come your way will make you ballistic. For example, you misspell words on a paper at work or school. You then are confronted by your teacher or boss who responds in a negative way concerning your spelling. This results in an internal conversation with yourself about the interaction. From the results of this interaction, you determine by your-

self—and yourself alone—whether you will drift into bad self-esteem or good self-esteem. This is a crucial point for you, because at this time you do have the power to choose.

Another factor that comes into play when a situation like this occurs, is that you recall similar incidents that have happened in the past. Other occasions when you have been teased, berated or belittled for your inability to master the English language can return. You believe that once again you have evidence from the past to support that you do not measure up to what your teacher or boss expects. You then drift into bad self-esteem.

Fortunately, as these memories are recalled, you still have the opportunity to choose between good self-esteem or bad self-esteem. You also have the opportunity, at this time, to allow your boss or teacher to be more powerful than you are. You are responsible for this choice; do not allow the teacher or the boss to make the decision for you.

When it comes to your self-esteem, you are a powerful person. That power is not in the hands of your boss or teacher. *Claim your power!*

Chapter 2

The Art of Friendship

In my childhood, much like many other LD children, I had trouble making friends. Perhaps this was due to the fear of being discovered, being teased or just not having good social skills. As a young adult, I considered almost anyone who was friendly toward me—or even talked to me—a friend. This led to much confusion, heartache, financial loss and even some victimization. As some might say, I was not very street smart.

In today's world true friends are hard to find. Once they are found, they should be treasured. Being dyslexic or LD adds an interesting twist to the equation of making friends.

Many dyslexic or LD people are dealing with the issue of discovery. They are protecting a secret. If you have a secret, you will tend to hold the whole world—including relationships—at a distance, carefully weighing social situations in defense of this secret.

Studies show that most friendships start in some kind of social situation—work, school, civic activities or church. The chances of meeting someone when you are sitting alone in front of your television set eating potato chips is remote.

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Let's look at the example of avoiding church activities. In many religious organizations you may be called upon to read. The facilitator of a religious group can view this as an opportunity to invite you to participate in the group, hoping that you will learn more about and become part of the group. The facilitator's goal is to make you feel included. Unfortunately, you may feel more like you have been placed in front of a firing squad. What you may be missing when you choose not to attend groups such as this, however, is an opportunity to meet people your age who have similar values and live in the same area you do.

What can you do if you wish to attend a group such as this, but you are fearful of being called upon to read? It is entirely acceptable for you to ask to meet with the facilitator prior to the group. You will need to reveal your particular learning disability and to ask the facilitator not to call on you to read because of your disability. It is appropriate as well to ask the facilitator for the material to be covered during the group so you can review it before the group's meeting. A good facilitator's first goal should be to make people feel comfortable in the group. If the facilitator cannot agree to your request, then perhaps the group will be short one member.

Friendship is a two-way street; traffic flows equally in both directions. The dictionary defines friendship as having three specific characteristics: (1) you know this person; (2) you like this person; and (3) you trust this person. The following is an example of a situation that was not friendship.

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When I was a young adult, I met a person whom I considered a friend. Several days after meeting this person, he asked me to help him move from his apartment. While moving he told me of his financial problems and borrowed a great sum of money. A few days later I found myself speaking to him for several hours over the phone about the breakup of his dating relationship.

Two months later I was moving from my apartment. I was also flat broke. I phoned my so-called friend, who was now back with his girlfriend. He informed me that he wished he could help me move, but he was unable to do so. And as far as the money, he would pay me back as soon as he could.

It is now over twenty years later and I haven't heard from this person. I believe he does not plan on paying back the money. I thought I knew this person; I thought I liked this person; I thought I trusted this person. The reality was that I liked this person; however, to know and trust him would have taken more time. You may have had a similar experience.

When you are faced with a situation like I just described, you have two choices. The first choice is to vow never to trust anyone again and adopt the philosophy that the world is a scary place full of evil people. Or you can choose to learn from the situation and become wiser. You can vow not to allow yourself to be conned by people who use friendship as a ploy to separate you from your time and hard-earned money.

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It is my observation that television also confuses the real meaning of friendship. Let's take, for example, the insurance industry. Prior to television, most insurance agents were considered to be in the same category as tax collectors. The insurance industry has learned well the three factors of friendship. You think you know this person because you see his smiling, happy face on television. You like this person because he appears friendly and may look like your Uncle Fred. You may trust this person because of his kind-looking hands. Then you discover that after your son's first fender-bender at age 16, your insurance premium doubles or you are dropped like a hot potato.

Friendship, as previously stated, is a two-way street with mutual respect held at its center. Until these factors are present, true friendship does not exist. Friendship may exist; relationship may exist; however, true friendship does not exist.

How do you get to a point where you can develop true friendships? True friendship requires a risk as well as trust and mutual respect. You cannot make a person trust you or respect you; that is the other person's choice. This is why so many people find true friendship a frightening endeavor.

A milestone for me in developing true friendships was when I chose to go public with my dyslexia at age 25. Much to my surprise, no one died! The response, however, was varied. Some people moved away and I never saw them again. For the

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most part, people were curious. They wanted to know more, and some took a step closer. These people became my true friends. I no longer had a secret, and I no longer had a reason to hold people and society away at an arms length in order to protect myself.

Making true friendships is an art and not a science. Science says it can combine two or more elements and the result will be the same 100 per cent of the time. Art is different. It consists of combining many things, mixing them together and seeing the results. Sometimes the results are what you expected; sometimes they are a pleasant surprise.

Chapter 3

Job-Seeking Skills

I wish to begin this chapter by talking about three myths that many people in America seem to have. The first myth is that at different times in history the world runs out of work, resulting in a depression where many people are unemployed. The truth is that the world has never run out of work. The world runs out of work that people prefer to do, and the world runs out of work that it will pay people to do.

The second myth is that individuals will continue with the same career they chose when they graduated from high school, college or technical school for the rest of their lives. Studies show that most individuals will change not only their jobs but entire careers between six to eight times in a working lifetime.

The third myth is that most jobs are found in the want ads. Quite the opposite is true. Less than ten percent of jobs are found in the want ads. Most jobs are found through your ability to connect with other people by word of mouth to let them know that you are in the job market. The old saying that the person who obtained the job that you desired "knew someone in the business" is often the truth.

Your first step in obtaining a job is to let the world know that you are in the job market-even if you were fired. They are going to find out anyway. The next step is to contact and meet the people that are in positions of referring or hiring.

In most job situations, it is essential for you to have a resume. If you have a learning disability, this can present a challenge. However, in many cases a resume can be your best friend as well as your foot in the door for that first interview.

There have been volumes written about resumes and millions of dollars made on workshops about writing resumes. However, the following will save you much time and money. Let's address some of the information you need to include in a resume.

1. The first basic element of a resume is your name and address. Sounds simple so far, doesn't it?
2. You then need to explain to the readers what you can do for them. When you are job searching, it is important to remember that the reason they are hiring is they have a problem which you can fix or they have a job they do not want to do or cannot do. That is why it is essential for you to list the skills you have.
3. Next list the particular license(s) you have that will allow you to comply with state or federal regulations.
4. Explain your educational background, starting with your most recent educational experience. Remember that employers are interested in how you can help them, not necessarily what your education is.

5. Another important part of your resume is to list your leisure activities. Often leisure skills and activities can dovetail well into a position an employer may be seeking to fill.

The following is an example from my personal life. I was able to obtain a very lucrative contract because of my resume when its reader discovered that I had a background in public-access television production and editing. One of his goals was to develop a video library of continuing education activities. I was able to help him achieve that goal. He had no idea that I had skills in these areas until he saw it listed in my leisure activities.

6. Use your resume to detail the civic activities in which you are involved. It is amazing how beneficial it is for you when the interviewer discovers you both attend the same church or civic club.

I suggest that before you write a resume, go to your best friend—the public library. Look up the topic “resume.” If your learning disability prevents you from looking up the particular information, contact the research librarian. Explain the nature of your disability. Often research librarians spend much of their time picking up after people and chasing noisy people out of the library. The librarian probably has the equivalent of a masters degree or higher and will be delighted when someone comes with an intelligent question and need. Do not be afraid of the public library or the research librarian. They can be your best friends.

Once you obtain the information about resumes, look at how it is laid out. You will be presented with several options. Pick the one you feel best meets your needs.

With this information, I have saved you from reading another book or attending an expensive resume workshop. When you have your resume information in order, type your resume, or have someone type it for you. Check your spelling and make several copies.

Once a resume is written and printed, it is important that you review it at least once a year to make appropriate changes. This is true even if you are quite satisfied with your existing job. In today's workplace it is difficult to tell when a job may be drying up or when a better job may be coming. Always be prepared to send your resume when that special job becomes available.

When you are invited to take part in a job interview, a particular challenge can be created if you have trouble spelling. That is why it is important to be organized when you come to a job interview. It is essential to have your resume with you, as well as a list of references. The information you will need for references includes the references' names—spelled correctly—with their addresses, titles and phone numbers. When you are asked to fill out a form, you can open up your file and copy from your file onto their application.

I also find it extremely beneficial to know how to spell "resume." If the information needed on

their application is on your resume, simply write "see resume."

When you enter a job interview with a small portfolio, the individual interviewing you will not see you as someone who needs help spelling. You will be seen as organized, which will work to your advantage in a job interview.

When you enter a job interview, it is important to realize that the person interviewing you will rely upon what is called "gut-level feeling" when hiring an employee. On hundreds of occasions I have heard individuals ask why the interviewer hired one particular applicant over another, and all too often the response is, "I had a gut-level feeling." This is your time to give the interviewer the "gut-level feeling" that you are the person for the job.

In the job interview, contrary to what some people may believe, I feel it is necessary to disclose that you have a learning disability. If you disclose your learning disability and you are hired, the Americans with Disabilities Act will protect you. "Learning disability" is clearly stated and protected in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

When you explain in the interview that you have a learning disability, it is also essential that you follow up immediately with a "however." Talk to the interviewer about the ways you have learned to compensate for your disability. I state that I have my own system for working with paperwork. This system includes looking up words on an electronic

spelling computer which fits in my briefcase. I also state that I work hard on my paperwork—harder than my peers—even if it means taking it home and working on it in the evening. If you do make a statement like this in an interview, make sure you are prepared to follow through.

Once again, many people that interview make the final judgment about hiring an individual upon something which they call “gut feeling.” It is your job to give this person the feeling that you are the person that can do the job. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you look confident and act confident. Be prepared to answer any questions about your learning disability and how you can compensate in the workplace.

In addition, it is essential to be fair to your present or past employer. Be sure you give a reasonable amount of notice that you are leaving your current job to obtain another. If you are asked at a job interview when you can start, let the interviewer know you must give your present employer reasonable notice of your departure. When you insist on treating your current employers fairly, your new employers will believe that if you choose to leave their company, you will also give reasonable notice—not leaving him or her high and dry.

If you are immediately offered a job and you accept it, *Congratulations!* If you are told by the interviewer that you will be contacted, it is appropriate to ask in a polite manner when that will be.

It is very inefficient to apply for one job, attend one interview and wait for an unreasonable

amount of time expecting a phone call. Your potential employer is taking the liberty to interview as many people as desired. Consequently, you should feel free to accept as many job interviews as you wish. In other words, it is a waste of your time to apply for one job, go to one job interview, return home to sit on your behind for two months eating potato chips and watching TV while you wait for that one telephone call.

If you are offered two jobs at the same time because you had more than one successful interview, you can always tell the potential employer in a polite manner, "Thank you, but no thank you."

Chapter 4

Job-Keeping Skills

To begin, I wish to dispel a myth about the job place. Most people today do not lose their jobs because their job performance is poor. Most people lose their jobs because they cannot get along with the people they work beside daily—their boss(es), coworkers, customers or clients.

When you are on the job, it is essential to remain neutral in the following three areas: politics, religion and negative gossip. This does not mean that you cannot be faithful to your religion or your political party. Nor does it mean that you do not take part in negative gossip in places other than work. But the fact remains that nothing will “turn a person’s crank” quicker than politics or religion, and nothing will destroy a person’s reputation quicker than negative gossip. If you take part in the negative rumor mill, sooner or later it will include you. The best way to stop this rumor mill in the work place is not to take part in it.

You will be hot on the trail of getting along with people if you perform your job well. This presents a special challenge to those of us who have learning disabilities. Each job place has its own organizational system. It is essential for you to have your own system also.

For example, I carry a briefcase. In the briefcase I have a file for each one of my active clients. In the file there are computer printouts for each client; the client's name, address and other pertinent information are readily available to me. Of particular importance is the fact that I can quickly reference the correct spelling of their names, addresses and so forth.

On the inside cover of each file are relevant words used when completing the charting for each one of my clients. These range from very complex words to very simple words. They allow me ready access to the appropriate spelling of words that I need.

An appointment book is always in my briefcase. This book is used to record the month, date and time I plan to see each client. When I am finished seeing that client, I make a check behind his or her name. When I finish the appropriate paperwork for each client, the check becomes an "x." This system allows me immediate access when I am asked if I have seen a client and if I have done the appropriate paperwork for that client. I can tell the inquiring person in a few minutes if I have seen that client, the month, date and time I saw the client and if I have finished the appropriate paperwork for that client.

What is the usual response from the person asking about a client that I have seen? They believe I am organized.

My briefcase also includes a portable spell check and a pad of paper. Throughout the day, I write several notes to myself and place them in my pockets. This particular system allows me to be mobile. I can perform my paperwork in any quiet place, even if it is at my kitchen table during the evening.

I often work at night on my paperwork, even though my peers do not. They are able to finish their paperwork during the work day. Because of my learning disability, it takes me longer to perform this particular function. Consequently, working at night is an essential job-keeping skill for me. Taking paperwork home at night when my peers do not seems to be unfair, but whoever told you life is fair told you a lie.

Another important area in my own personal reference system is the office that I maintain in my home. It consists of a desk, several file cabinets and bookshelves. These bookshelves hold books as well as many audio and video tapes. I have quick access to information which helps me perform my job. This is my system; I am the only one who has access to this office; the system works for me.

Another important thing to remember is that each job place has "holy cows." "Holy cows" can be people or things. On one of my first jobs, there was an administrator who was short and wide. He had a crew cut, thick glasses and always wore a white shirt with a bow tie. During the two years that I worked in this work place, it appeared to me that this administrator held his position for two reasons: (1) He had worked there the longest, and (2) he was not

dead yet. His organizational skills seemed mediocre; his ability to lead others appeared nonexistent. Within this particular community, however, he was a "holy cow." You did not make fun of him, and you always addressed him as "Mr." If you did not comply, you would not be working in this particular center for any length of time.

Several years ago I had another job where the "holy cow" was not a person but a thing. The thing was professional hockey. Everyone from owner to general manager to stock clerks, who were moving their way up in this particular corporate situation, had season tickets for a local hockey team. Hockey was the focal point of any social activity or conversation. Personally I have no interest in hockey and did not advance at this work place; I did not stay very long.

I am not asking you to compromise your values when it comes to addressing a "holy cow." I am asking you to be aware that they do exist. It is up to you to decide if you choose to take part in these particular "holy-cow" situations.

Always remain true to your own principles and values, but be aware that each work place has its own systems, values and "holy cows."

Chapter 5

Too Much Time on Sycamore Street

Once upon a time there was a town. The name and the place are not important; however, the town is very much like yours. One bright, sunny morning the emergency telephone operator receives a call. The conversation is as follows:

OPERATOR: "Emergency operator. May I help you?"

CALLER: "Is this the emergency operator?"

OPERATOR: "Yes, it is."

CALLER: "I want to report a dead body in my back yard."

OPERATOR: "A dead body in your back yard! What is your name?"

CALLER: "My name is Bill Jones."

OPERATOR: "Please spell your last name, sir."

CALLER: "J-O-N-E-S."

OPERATOR: "What is your address, Mr. Jones?"

CALLER: "364 Sycamore Street."

OPERATOR: "Please spell Sycamore."

CALLER: "Oh, sure. S-I-Q-no-C—S-I-C-C-C—just a moment."

At this time the emergency operator waits and waits and waits. After a lengthy time, the voice returns.

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CALLER: "Is this the emergency operator I was talking to earlier?"

OPERATOR: "Yes, it is."

CALLER: "Well, I dragged that dead body down to Oak Street. That is spelled O-A-K."

This is the end of the conversation.

How is this story pertinent to those of us who have a learning disability? It is very pertinent, because many of us have spent too much time on Sycamore Street. We spend much time and effort going way around situations where we will be asked to read, write or spell. The anxiety and shame centered in the mere anticipation of being requested to read, write and spell will cause many of us to launch into our defense cycle. We then spend too much time, energy and effort in an area that is not deserving of our attention.

With many learning disabled people, this anxiety results in lack of participation in many things which could be beneficial to us—for example, continuing education classes and programs at our children's schools. We even may avoid such places as church, particularly Bible studies.

What is our personal loss—our personal expense—of spending too much time on Sycamore Street?

Chapter 6

A Good Night's Sleep

A number of people with learning disabilities complain of having trouble sleeping. Once again, I must dispel a myth. You do not make yourself go to sleep; you allow yourself to go to sleep. Sleep is a natural process which provides balanced physical and psychological well being. Recent research indicates that it is not a matter of how long you sleep, but how deeply you sleep.

Many people feel Thomas Edison had a learning disability; he slept only a few hours each night. However, he did believe in something called "cat napping." "Cat naps" are short periods of rest throughout the day. He would lay down wherever he was, even if it was on the floor or on a countertop-and take a short nap. He was not sleeping long, but he was sleeping deeply.

I once had a client who would not go to bed until 3:00 in the morning. He would spend most of the evening and morning hours watching television. He did not take part in regular exercise, nor did he eat correctly. One of his major complaints was chronic fatigue, yet he normally slept until 3:00 in the afternoon. This was a total of 12 hours of sleep per 24-hour period. He was sleeping long, but he was not sleeping well.

It is a myth that sleeping pills will provide a good night's sleep. As a matter of fact, if you do have a severe sleeping disorder that goes undiagnosed by a medical doctor, you could accidentally kill yourself by overuse of sleeping pills. If you feel that you have a chronic sleeping problem which has been going on for an unreasonable length of time, you should be evaluated by a medical doctor. If a sleeping disorder is diagnosed, there are excellent interventions which your physician can prescribe.

I repeat that self-medication can prove to be very dangerous, particularly if you exceed the recommended amounts of over-the-counter medication. This overuse can actually result in the problem getting worse. If alcohol is used, it is shown only to be effective for a few hours. Consequently, you may awaken after two to three hours of sleep and be unable to go back to sleep.

If you have contacted your physician and, in his or her opinion, your sleep disorder does not require medical intervention, there are things you can do.

Remember, you cannot make yourself go to sleep, but you allow yourself to go to sleep. It is a reward which you give yourself after a long, busy day.

First of all, it would be beneficial to start a regular routine. Our bodies do respond to routine; therefore, you need to start giving your body signals that it is time for bed. One of the best signals for your body is to keep a regular bed time, even on the

weekends. Nothing can mess up a sleeping pattern worse than regularly rising during the week at an early hour—such as 6 a.m.—but on the weekends staying up until 3:00 in the morning, then sleeping on Saturday and Sunday until 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. A regular bedtime is essential.

Another item is to keep your sleeping area separate from the other areas of the house. Do not use your bedroom for an office, a party room or a television lounge.

An activity which allows me to go to sleep is reading. Reading can cause a physiological reaction that helps some learning disabled people fall asleep. This is supported by recent PET-scan research. When non-learning disabled individuals read, PET-scan research shows that two to three small areas light up in their brains. When many learning disabled people read, the whole brain lights up; this results in much effort being expended while reading, resulting in the eyes and mind becoming tired. It is much easier to go to sleep when your mind is at ease and tired than when only your body is tired and your mind is still active.

Another issue is that of exercise. Regular exercise at least three times per week can improve the quality of your sleep. Exercise provides the ability to work off stress in addition to enhancing your muscle tone.

Many people do not consider how their diet relates to a good night's sleep. A heavy meal or spicy food can directly affect sleep, especially if eaten only hours before you need to go to sleep.

Do you use caffeine? Caffeine is a stimulant and will stay in your system several hours after ingesting. There are some carbonated beverages that have three times the amount of caffeine of some coffees. Caffeine is also present in some chocolate.

The art of clearing your mind is the final process toward a good night's sleep. It is a skill that can be difficult to learn, but it is very beneficial. After the lights go out and you close your eyes, very often the activities of the day revisit us. If your mind is active, particularly with things that are not pleasant, sleep will be nearly impossible. That is why this ability is so important. After all, who is in control, you or the activities of the day? I hope your answer is "you."

To start practicing the art of clearing your mind, use your ability to visualize. This is a skill that many of us have. Visualize something that is very relaxing to you. Examples are a calm sea, a calm day or sitting in a beautiful garden. For some people it may be visualizing the darkness of space. The more you practice clearing your mind, the easier it will become.

Have a good night's sleep; I will talk to you again in the morning.

Chapter 7

Sexuality

If you turn to this chapter with the expectation that it will be rated "X," I am sorry to disappoint you. However, I do see that I have your attention.

Sexuality is much more than sexual intercourse. It is how we perceive ourselves, as well as how we perceive others as sexual beings. For example, do you ever wonder why so many elderly people are dressed up when they go to a shopping center? The men are in a tie and coat; women are wearing dresses and their hair is nicely done. It is because it is very important for them to be identified as a man or a woman.

We all identify with our own sexual gender. This is part of who we really are. It is when these things are handled negatively that they cause problems. If strength and muscle are used to intimidate and push people around, our society refers to the offender as a "bully." When provocative dress and inappropriate talk and behavior are used, our society very often refers to that person as a "flirt." These two behaviors only result in proving that big people can beat up on little people, and people can attempt to get what they want from others by raising their hormones.

We all have sexual drives and needs. However, it is how we handle these things that is of utmost importance.

How do you feel about your sexuality? What are the internal words that you use to describe yourself? If you are a man, does the word "wimp" push one of your buttons? If you are a woman, does the word "ugly" bring a strong reaction? How often do you use these words inside your own heart and mind? They are a direct mirror as to how you perceive your sexuality.

If you find that you are engaging in this type of self talk, it is time to do something different. To begin kicking yourself because you are doing this is not a constructive use of your time.

Negative internal talk very often results in negative behavior. Today you can start changing the way you think. You can even start at this moment changing how you feel about your own sexuality.

Do you find that you are taking part in negative talk as I just described it? You can tell yourself "Stop!" and immediately replace it with another word. For example, for the word "wimp," you might replace it with the word "strong." For the word "ugly," you may use the word "pretty."

If you find that you are taking part in sexual behaviors that you feel are not appropriate and you wish to change, you have the power to do so. Behaviors very often start with internal conversation.

Remember, you are "strong," and you are "pretty."

Chapter 8

Finding a Tutor

Before launching a search for a tutor, you first must admit that you have problems which center around reading, writing, spelling or any combination of all three. Second, you must promise to yourself that you are willing to work with a tutor for a particular length of time. It is true that an adult going through tutoring can move one to three grade levels in one year's tutoring time. However, the key word here is "time."

There are many resources for finding tutors. The first and most successful area is your own public library. Many times tutoring services are posted on bulletin boards, or your research librarian can be a resource for you. Many tutoring services are free; some have a nominal charge.

Another area to explore is your local learning disabilities' organizations which are nonprofit. There are other programs around; however, some of these programs charge their participants hundreds of dollars for the program. There are many successful programs out there that are free or at minimal charge.

I strongly suggest that you look for a program that uses a multisensory approach. I would advise shying away from any program that requires hundreds of dollars be paid prior to beginning the tutoring. Also avoid any program or individual that

states there is no such thing as dyslexia or learning disabilities, and they have a cure that can help everyone.

In my opinion, the main focus of a good tutoring program should be: (1) a multisensory approach to learning, (2) a tutor who is willing and committed and (3) a student who is willing and committed.

Another recommendation is to stay away from highly expensive special diets, expensive vitamins or other techniques which sound too good to be true—such as manipulating the bones in the skull. If a program sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true.

When you are considering a particular tutor, I would recommend that you interview the tutor. Remember, an interview works both ways. You need to feel comfortable with the person who is going to be tutoring you, and the person who is doing the tutoring needs to feel comfortable with you.

For many of us to admit that we have a problem with the reading, writing and spelling world is a highly emotional and embarrassing thing to do. That is why it is important in the interview to bring up the issue of confidentiality.

I do recommend one-to-one tutoring; however, group tutoring may be an alternative. If you are involved in a group tutoring program, it is appropriate to discuss with the group the need for confidentiality. All members should agree that anything concerning their group will not go any further than the individuals in the group.

Remember that an important commitment to tutoring is one of time. One of the best investments you can make for your future is to make an investment in yourself.

Chapter 9

"Going Public"

"Going public" with your dyslexia or learning disability certainly is a personal choice. Many people live their entire lives only sharing their learning disability or dyslexia with one or two people. This is completely appropriate if that is what you choose. There is no written rule or law stating that you must go completely public with your disability.

When I went public with my learning disability at age 25, much to my surprise, no one died. Many individuals that I knew responded with "Oh, that's why your spelling is so horrible." Some responded with "What is that?" and wanted to know more. To others it made no difference.

I believe that we do not live in a cruel society, but sometimes we live in a naive society. In some cases people responded to me with "Oh, you then see things backwards!" which for the most part is not true. That is why it is very important to have a good explanation about what your learning disability or dyslexia is and how it manifests itself in your life.

If you choose to go public with your dyslexia or learning disability, it is likely that one of three things will happen:

1. Nothing. For many of your friends it will not make a difference that you have an issue around reading, writing and spelling. After all, your true friends care about you because of who you are and the content of your character.
2. Some people may move away from you, but that is their choice. If they do not like you or accept you because of a particular disability or what they perceive as a flaw in your character, then I question their definition of friendship.
3. Some people will move closer. You have now disclosed something about yourself that most likely you have been hiding from your friends, relatives and society. It is amazing after you self-disclose how many people you will discover with a similar issue or how many people know someone or have a relative with a similar challenge.

Prior to going public I think it is also important that you be comfortable with the disclosure. Because I have gone public with my dyslexia, it does not necessarily mean that you have to go public with yours.

If you choose to go public with your dyslexia or learning disability, I think it is very important that you practice. This is something you can practice with your tutor or a good friend. Pay particular attention to *how you say* what you want to say. Do you say it like a mouse? Do you say it like an apology? Do you present it with "in your face" advocacy? Or do you say it as a fact?

If you say it like a mouse, people may not hear you. Does anyone ever take seriously what a mouse has to say?

If you say it like an "apology," then you imply that something is wrong with your character and you are requesting forgiveness or absolution from the person to whom you are disclosing this information.

Of all of these approaches, I feel that "in your face" advocacy is one of the most irritating avenues of self-disclosure. An example of this is: "I am dyslexic; I demand my rights. What are you going to do about it; I have a lawyer." I find that most people in our society are very accepting, but they are resentful of "in your face" advocacy.

If you state your self-disclosure as a "matter of fact," then it remains exactly that. It is something that is a part of you; it affects you; you are not ashamed of it; you do not need forgiveness for it. You also do not need to stomp on someone in order to receive acceptance or your rights.

In summary, if you decide to self-disclose your learning disability or dyslexia, you need to feel comfortable with the disclosure and have an adequate description of your disability and how it is manifested in your life. Be sure your approach is "matter of fact" and your manner is adult.

Chapter 10

Picking a Career

I am amazed how many people—learning disabled or not—will pursue a particular occupation or career without knowing anything about it. The announcement is then made later in life that they have discovered their field of choice is not for them and/or they hate what they are doing.

Let's look at the choice to become medical doctors. A number of learning disabled individuals have told me in confidence that their ultimate career choice is to become a medical doctor. This may not be that unusual; I know three dyslexic medical doctors. If the choice to become a medical doctor, however, is because of their experience as patients, it is a mistake. What a patient sees a medical doctor perform and what a medical doctor actually does are two different things.

For instance, when you go to a medical doctor for strep throat, the doctor enters the room, asks you to explain your symptoms and tells you to open your mouth. After your symptoms are reviewed, the doctor makes a diagnosis of strep throat and gives you an appropriate medication. It all appears to be quite simple.

Some would look at this situation and say "I could do that" and feel they would make a good medical doctor. This again is a mistake. They have

not taken into account the great amount of education that medical doctors need in order to obtain their licenses.

To make a career choice with only a short period of observation is foolish. You must obtain a better idea of what is done during the work day and what the educational requirements are. As I stated, I know three individuals who are medical doctors and are dyslexic. I also know that most medical doctors spend a great deal of time reading, writing and spelling.

Information about what educational background an individual needs to perform a specific job can be obtained through your guidance counselor's office or by contacting a particular school that has that program. To understand what individuals really do on a day-to-day basis, however, you must follow them through at least one or two days. This is called "shadowing." When you shadow, pay particular attention to how much time is spent in the areas in which you are challenged, such as reading, writing and spelling.

Once you have learned what the educational requirements are and you have shadowed an individual, you will have a much better idea of the realities within that particular career. Then ask yourself three questions:

1. Could I learn to do that?
2. Would I like to do that?
3. Would I be happy doing that?

When you start looking at post-secondary programs, it is important to realize that in the future many—if not the majority—of the jobs that pay well may not be for college graduates; those jobs may be for the technically trained. This is evident to me as I observe our world changing from an industrial society to an information society—with great emphasis on computers. There are thousands of people who can operate computers, but how many people can fix computers once they break down?

When you finally choose a college or technical school, it is completely appropriate to interview the college or technical school. Interview the person in charge of your program. When you perform your interview, I believe it is essential for you to disclose that you have a learning disability or dyslexia.

Most colleges or technical schools now have special needs' offices with the mission of providing reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. These offices do not exist to do the work for you, but they do exist to provide reasonable accommodation. The school may provide you with a person who can take notes for you, allow you to copy someone else's notes or reserve a seat for you close to the instructor where you will not be distracted.

When you go to the special needs' office, it will not be enough to disclose that you have dyslexia or a learning disability; you will need to show proof that you have such a disability. You will also need to explain how your disability manifests itself.

If you do not understand the nature of your disability, you cannot advocate for yourself.

It is acceptable to interview the instructors of your classes. I did this during my college years and was met with a wide variety of responses. I once approached a biology instructor and disclosed that I was dyslexic. His response was, "What is that? I am not going to do any reasonable accommodation for you. Either you make it through my class or not!" On another occasion I met with a psychology instructor who clapped her hands together and, with a great smile on her face, stated, "Tell me more. My son is dyslexic."

Self-disclosure does not guarantee a positive response; however, it can tell you which instructors to pick and which ones to avoid. I am of the opinion that most instructors prefer to have students in their classrooms who are willing and wanting to learn, as well as to be there.

College and technical school is a time of learning; it can also be sprinkled with periods of fun. And it can have great social benefits. Keep in mind, however, that this is a time when you are learning something that will benefit your future career. You need to own a particular body of knowledge in order to function as a competent professional.

If you are going to college or technical school with the expectation that you will party until 3 a.m. and go to class during the day, you are wasting your time and money. Studying for us presents a challenge. When your fellow classmates are through studying and you must continue studying because

of your style of learning, you will probably feel this is not fair. It is not fair. The person who told you that life is always fair told you a lie. I find that sometimes life is unfair; sometimes life is very fair.

Chapter 11

Getting Organized

In order to understand "organized," you first must have a definition of "disorganized." I find that disorganization means one or both of the following: (1) The inability to be on time and/or (2) the inability to find something when you want or need to find it.

Many people feel that if they just had a \$2,000 computer, they could be organized. However, you must be organized in order to organize the computer. You can start getting organized right now and it will cost you little or nothing.

The first thing you need is a calendar. Generally, these are free or available at low cost in your local hardware or drug store. They come in many varieties; I have two. I have one that hangs on the wall, which is responsible for my appointments and commitments after 6:00 at night, and I have one that fits into my briefcase, which is responsible for my appointments between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The second thing is a shoe box. Some people even indulge themselves by having more than one. How many times have you heard this statement: "I know I have that piece of paper here, but I can't find it." If you have extra money, you eventually can invest in a file cabinet. When an important

piece of paper comes to your attention, place it in your file in a way that you can *retrieve it*.

It does not matter if your system makes sense to anyone else. Most important is that the system makes sense to you. You need to be able to retrieve information when you want it.

The third thing is an inexpensive box of highlighters. Highlighters can be very helpful if you have issues around reading. You can highlight particular things that need to be remembered, such as bills and the dates they are due. Other people, if they are willing to assist you, can do this for you. Once again, it is your system.

In my work world I carry a briefcase. In the briefcase there is a small computer that I use for spelling. I also have a file for every client I see; each file has information that is pertinent to that client. On the inside cover I write specific words that relate to that client. When I need to write about a certain client, I am able to pull his or her folder. In front of me is information that is pertinent to that client, such as his or her name, the issues on which he or she is working, as well as words that I need to spell when I write the report. I also keep a file of business cards, as well as a file of telephone numbers.

Could anyone else retrieve information from my particular filing system? Probably not. However, it is my system, and it works for me.

When people see me enter a building with my briefcase, I have never had anyone state, "You must be dyslexic or learning disabled." They look at me and say, "My, you must be organized."

Chapter 12

Starting a Support Group

In my years of working with support groups, I have seen some support groups which I consider disasters. These are groups that become nothing more than "woe is me; ain't it awful" groups with an "us versus them" mentality. Result: nothing positive happens.

The goal of a support group is to provide camaraderie, understanding and movement in a positive direction. That is why it is essential for every support group to have a facilitator or, in some cases, two facilitators; this is known as co-facilitation.

Facilitators need to be inventive. They need to be able to direct people to community resources if there is an issue which is beyond the scope of the support group. Facilitators need to keep the group on the topic or task. They need to be able to set limits and to ensure that everyone in the group keeps the group rules. Facilitators need to keep the group pointed in a particular direction; the group needs to be focused on the final positive outcome. And, above all, facilitators need experience.

Any support group needs a time frame, i.e., the group meets every Wednesday night from 7:00 to 8:30. It also needs a time that it starts and a time that it stops, i.e., starts in September and ends in May. This is essential because all of the individuals

understand that they have so much time to use this support group for what they perceive as important

It is also essential that the group has rules.

1. Respect. Whatever anyone says—even if it seems ridiculous—is respected.
2. Confidentiality. What is said in the group does not go beyond the group.
3. This is a support group, not a group therapy session. If individuals do not wish to talk about a particular topic for whatever reason, they may elect to pass. Confrontation is something that can happen in group therapy, but in a support group I feel it is inappropriate to do strong confrontation.

There are a number of places a support group can meet. It can certainly meet in an individual's home or it can meet in a park. Many community-based groups that work with the learning disabled would be able to provide a support area. Also, don't forget one of your best friends in the community—the public library. You help to support the public library through your tax dollars, and it very often has rooms available for public use.

Chapter 13

Your Inner Storm

Many individuals with dyslexia or other learning disabilities describe their inner emotions as a storm. However, contrary to what some individuals may believe, everyone has an inner storm, learning disabled, dyslexic or not. As snowflakes are different from one another, so is everyone's inner storm.

Most people, at some point in their lives, have wished to completely change places with someone else, change their inner storm for someone else's issues. However, I can guarantee that if you spend enough time talking with anyone else in this world—if they are honest with you—and you really learn what their inner storm is, you will not want to change places with them for all the gold, silver and jewels in the world.

If everyone has an inner storm, then what are we to do? Of most importance is how you view an inner storm and what your conception of the word "storm" is. A storm is something that can bring severe winds, lightening and hail; it can be quite devastating to the environment. However, that same storm can bring badly needed rain and cool a dried and parched desert.

There is a phrase in our culture that says, "What is the fire in your belly?" This is a phrase that goes back over a hundred years in American folk lore. It

goes back to the old paddle boats that used to steam up and down the Mississippi River. Occasionally these great paddle boats would begin to race. In order to make more steam, the captain would call to the fireman to throw in more wood or coal, depending on what they were burning. The hotter the fire, the greater the head of steam, the faster the ship.

Occasionally the captain would yell down for the fireman to throw in a case of lard or something else that would burn very quickly to create more steam, causing him to win the race. The other captain would yell out, "What is the fire in your belly?" Thus, this phrase remains a part of American language today.

Much like a steamship, we can use the fire in our belly to steer us in a direction to win a race, or we can use it to run us aground quicker, or to destroy the ship altogether. In modern terms, we would refer to this as being reactive or proactive.

If you are reading this, more than likely the "fire in your belly" centers around your learning disability or dyslexia. Are you going to let the "fire in your belly" run you in a direction that you choose not to go? That is reactive. Or do you choose to be proactive? Are you going to use the "fire in your belly" as the launching pad toward who you want to be and what you want to become? The choice is yours.

Chapter 14

Tactile Defensiveness

The sensation of touch has two functions. The first one is to tell us pleasure; the second one is to tell us "unpleasure." Many people, among them learning disabled and dyslexic men and women, are what we call tactically defensive.

This represents an area in which I have had some of my greatest battles with psychologists and psychotherapists, who I dare say, for the most part, do not understand the definition of tactile defensiveness.

Tactile defensiveness is an issue that is neurological—not psychological. In my childhood, I was tactically defensive in several areas. My tactile defensiveness manifested itself in the following ways:

I was sensitive toward particular types of fabric. I could not stand those particular fabrics against my skin. My feet were also tactically defensive. I was constantly taking my shoes off because they were too tight or too warm.

Pressure or heat on my back was another problem. Consequently, in school I was constantly shuffling in my desk chair to find a more comfortable position. As I grew older, my tactile defensiveness became less; however, as I dictate this chapter, I am barefoot.

Tactile defensiveness can manifest itself in different ways. Some individuals have tactile defensiveness toward objects against their skin, such as labels on clothing. This may manifest itself by individuals cutting all the labels out of their clothes.

I am aware of a case where a child was observed cutting the labels out of his clothing. This was observed by his parents, who brought this to the attention of their friendly neighborhood psychotherapist. The psychotherapist spent the next six months exploring why the child was so angry at his parents and why he was symbolically killing them by cutting the labels out of his clothing.

Another example was a young man that did not like to be touched. This presented a particular issue when he became married; he had tremendous difficulty being intimate with his spouse. After much discussion in the family, it was determined that this young man should see a psychologist, who spent several months exploring the man's sexual orientation. The psychologist told him that he was gay and did not realize it. The man was told to explore his sexual orientation further.

To an occupational therapist, both of these people were obviously tactically defensive. If you hate your mother, you hate your mother. You need to deal with this. If you are gay, you are gay. That's the way you are. However, because the psychotherapist and psychologist I described above did not understand the subject of tactile defensiveness, they caused these people more harm than good.

If you feel that you may have an issue around tactile defensiveness, you can deal with it. I humbly feel that the best persons to see about tactile defensiveness are Registered Occupational Therapists. They can work with you or help you find a program to deal with your tactile defensiveness.

As you begin working through this issue, it is important to respond positively rather than negatively. Most people that become involved in a program dealing with tactile defensiveness report that the program is enjoyable.

You may find that this service is covered by your existing health insurance, or there may be an occupational therapist available through your school system.

Chapter 15

Paying Attention

"Paying attention" was the biggest complaint that my grade school teachers had against me. If you read my first book, *The Runaway Learning Machine*, you will recall that I spent more time in the first grade looking at the lights on the ceiling than at the blackboard. This is because, at that time, the lights on the ceiling made more sense to me than what the teacher had on the blackboard. However, paying attention is something that we all need to do.

Paying attention is accomplished by occupying one or more of the six senses. Did I say "six?" Usually you hear people refer to five senses; however, there are six: sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell and the sixth one—which is often left out is vestibular movement.

Many people have to move in order to learn. In the past we have called these people "fidgeters" or "jumpy." However, some people have to move to learn. Thus, for these students a classroom with nice neat rows where they are not allowed to move can be devastating. This is a topic we will discuss later in another chapter.

For those of us who have an issue around paying attention, there are ways to deal with this. First of all, as much as possible, set up the environment

so it will be conducive for you to learn. For instance, if you plan to attend a class make sure that you arrive early enough to get a seat near the front. This eliminates much background noise, as well as other visual distractions. However, this does present a particular challenge for those of us who are used to sitting in the back of the room as close to the door as possible.

A good way of paying attention is to involve more than one sense. For many of us, multisensory is the best way to learn. Providing a deep pressure—a deep touch—very often helps us to pay attention in a classroom. This can be done in several ways: crossing the legs, crossing the ankles or providing deep pressure, such as with your arms across your chest.

Pick an instructor, if possible, that provides a lot of good visual aides. The use of a tape recorder, if allowed, can be very beneficial and an advantage to you. You not only will have notes, but you will also have the entire lecture verbatim on tape to play back at your leisure.

It may sound strange, but you can involve your mouth in "paying attention." Watch a professional basketball game. If you watch very closely, before many professional basketball players make a basket, their tongue will tell them where to go. That is, they will stick out their tongue in the direction in which they want to go. This provides some oral stimulation.

Oral stimulation often allows people to pay attention. If you watch children who are writing, reading or working diligently at a particular task, they will stick out their tongue or clench their teeth. In lieu of this information, I feel students should be allowed to chew gum in class.

Like many things, it is important for each individual to find his or her own particular style of paying attention. It is best for me to take only a few notes during a lecture and give my undivided attention to the instructor. I very often use a tape recorder, as well as preoccupy my mouth with something such as coffee or a beverage, if allowed. Once I have a tape, I find that I am better able to retain the information if I stand up and move when listening to it.

Once again, paying attention is a skill; it certainly can work for your benefit.

A common complaint from teachers or parents who work with young people that have learning disabilities is: "They certainly can pay attention during a rock concert, but they cannot pay attention in class."

In some cases the rock concert may be presenting a better opportunity for the individual to pay attention. Many classrooms exist with only one or two types of stimulation to the senses; the only senses usually stimulated are sight and hearing. A rock concert addresses all six sensory areas. You see the concert; you hear the concert. Very often the music is so loud it drives right through you; you can touch it. Often you are munching on something,

Too Much Time on Sycamore Street

such as junk food. The area is filled with smells, such as sweaty people or some other substance in the air. And you are moving!

If learning situations or classrooms would present themselves more like a rock concert, some individuals would certainly learn more.

Chapter 16

"I'm So Clumsy"

Many individuals with dyslexia or other learning disabilities have the secret complaint that they are clumsy. This is very often an area of shame, particularly for children, adolescents or young adults. There is much emphasis placed around being graceful and coordinated in our society, particularly if you are a female. Females are expected to carry themselves with grace; it is somewhat acceptable for males to state that they cannot, for instance, dance.

When I was in high school, as well as when I was a young adult, my middle name might as well have been "Clumsy." The best grade I ever received in physical education was a "C." Physical education, for some people, is an area in which they can excel. My experience was that it was another unobtainable challenge. Consequently, as an adult I have no interest in any sports which my high school attempted to teach me.

I feel that our society needs to take a closer look at the emphasis we put on achievement in this area during the high school years. It is quite possible to attend high school today, be as dumb as dirt, and have no interest in learning but wind up with a complete and fully paid college scholarship.

If you feel that you are clumsy, there are things that can be done, even if you are an adult. Wishing it away or talking about it for extraordinary amounts of time will not improve the situation. The only way to improve your coordination and decrease clumsiness is by doing. It may also be advisable to consult with an occupational therapist. The occupational therapist can suggest activities and help you develop a strategy. Remember, to improve you need to do!

A common complaint among adults who feel they are clumsy is that they hate all types of activities that involve sports. In discussions with these people, I find the thing they find most disgusting is not the activity itself, but the competition that closely accompanies these types of activities. For many of us, failure has been a constant companion and we do not need any more.

My personal feeling about sports or activities which resemble sports is that they have only three purposes:

1. A benefit to health. Activity can help control stress, as well as blood pressure and weight.
2. The enjoyment you get out of performing the activity.
3. The camaraderie you have with those who take part in the activity with you.

Who wins and what the difference in the score are of no value!

As a young adult, one of the most beneficial activities for me was playing racquetball. This was

not an activity which was discussed or played in high school. I picked individuals with whom I enjoyed spending time and who were not particularly competitive. The activity was beneficial in controlling my weight and stress. I enjoyed the camaraderie; I enjoyed the activity while I was doing it. In addition, slowly but surely my coordination improved. I still consider myself somewhat clumsy, but my situation has gotten better.

If you hate every activity that your high school attempted to teach you, there are hundreds of other activities which certainly can help improve your coordination. Some will cost little or nothing and are available at community centers such as the YMCA. However, it is important to check with your physician before starting any particular type of vigorous activity program.

How about simply walking? The only investment may be a comfortable pair of shoes and a good pair of socks. Or bicycle riding? Get that old bicycle out of mothballs, put a little oil on the chain and away you go. Two other activities that I feel are excellent are folk dancing and, if taught with the correct philosophy in mind, martial arts.

Our nervous systems are very plastic. This means ~~that~~ you can improve your coordination at any age. Don't be afraid to try more than one activity; or, if you feel particularly creative, invent your own.

Chapter 17

Forgiveness— A Difficult Task

For most of us, forgiveness is the most difficult task we will ever be asked to perform. Forgiveness is a principle of many religions and beliefs. During some point in your life, you will be asked to consider forgiveness. Your immediate response may be, "How could I possibly forget what happened to me?" Forgetting and forgiving, however, are two different things. You will always remember what happened to you, but you can forgive.

The second statement is very often, "How can I forgive someone who never said he or she was sorry? If given the chance, he or she would do the same again." The response to this is that forgiveness works from the inside out. It calms our inner self; it calms that inner storm with which we are all dealing. For some, working on forgiveness requires intervention by a trusted professional. Sometimes there are mighty stones standing in the way of forgiveness; sometimes you cannot move them alone.

The first step in forgiving is to make the following decision: "I choose to forgive." This can be a lifelong issue; however, walking hand in hand with forgiveness is peace.

Chapter 18

"Is My Very Best Only Adequate?"

Many of us have spent our childhood, as well as our teenage years, putting out 101% in a school system that did not necessarily understand our particular disability. Then, after all this effort, we only achieve a grade of "C." No matter what school system you are in, everyone understands what a "C" represents. Adequate!

Is it any wonder that many of us grow up with the question in the back of our mind, "Is my very best only adequate?" We then may develop the need to continually overachieve. Is it any wonder that many of us do not recognize outstanding achievement when we reach it and then develop the strange quirk of never being able to accept a compliment? After all, if your very best is only adequate, how could you possibly do anything that would warrant a compliment? What a strange circle to be caught in!

If you are tired of being caught in this circle, I have a suggestion. It is threefold:

1. Learn to accept compliments. First, you need to recognize compliments. Thank those who give you compliments, look at them and feel the compliments in your heart for the first time.

2. Believe that you are capable of doing many excellent things.
3. Learn to recognize these things when they happen to you.

If these three things do not feel like they fit you, work with them. New things do not always fit correctly the first time you try them. Think about a pair of new shoes; the more you wear them, the better they feel.

Remember, your very best is not just adequate; it is the best!

Chapter 19

Parenting

Parenting is one of the greatest responsibilities and challenges that we will face as adults. Ironically, it is one of the areas that most people are least prepared to handle.

I compare parenting to having a small tornado in your house. If you ignore it, it will grow larger and out of control. If you squelch it and make it stop spinning, it will cease to exist. Our greatest hope is to direct the tornado in a positive direction.

If you have two children, you have two tornadoes in your house. If anyone has trouble visualizing this comparison between a tornado and raising a child, all you have to do is look at the bedroom of a teenage child.

In the late 1970s, I had a coworker who was a child psychologist with a Ph.D. One day he announced to his coworkers that he was going to be married. Some time after he was married, he announced to us that he was going to be a father. We all congratulated him and wished him the best. I informed him that the child he was about to bring into the world would take 100% of his time, energy and patience, and steal 10% more. He informed me that he was a Ph.D. child psychologist, and there is no such thing as 110%.

Approximately six months after his child was born, I ran into my coworker again. I asked him

how parenting was going. He informed me that I was 110% correct.

Children are the quickest people in our lives to point out our personal hypocrisies. They will quickly let us know when we say one thing and do another. I firmly believe the reason for this is that our children look to us—whether we like it or not—for direction and modeling. Very often parents become angry when children point these things out to them. When certain buttons are pushed on our psychological button pad, we very often react negatively.

Truth is not in words, but truth is in action. What truth are you communicating when you tell your children not to use tobacco products, but use them yourself? If you are trying to instill the principle of honesty in a child, what truth are you telling when they see you call in sick to your place of work when you are not sick, while doodling with a pencil and paper you have taken from your workplace?

When you are trying to instill a positive attitude toward learning, what truth are you showing when a child sees you throwing down a tool, walking away from a responsibility or procrastinating?

Essential to any parenting relationship is communication. Communication first starts by looking. It is sad to see the amount of communication that goes on in a family without eye contact being made. Of utmost importance is to look at your children; give them undivided attention when you are first attempting to communicate.

When you come home from work or school, do you first seek out the people in your family who are most important to you; or do you first reach for a can of pop or the television remote control? People will feel that they are valued and are of importance when they are treated as such. It is easy to say that an individual human being is certainly more important than a can of pop or a remote control for a television; however, the truth is in the behavior.

Communication does not have to be profound. It can be, "How are you today?" It can even be as simple as talking about the weather. The response, no matter what its nature, needs to be accepted.

The opportunities for communication within many families are early in the morning, prior to work or school, or shortly after work or school. These are times when individuals are tired and have low blood sugar. An honest response to "How are you?" may be "Terrible!"

It is important to accept that response as a legitimate response. When parenting, it is important to be accepting of your children's negative moods and communication. Otherwise, it is highly unlikely that they will ever share deeper issues with you when they arise.

Remember, as a parent you do not have all the answers, even though you may be placed in the position of the family guru. It is perfectly acceptable to say to a child, "I don't know." Very often if this question is placed back on the children, it is amazing how often they, through their own wisdom, can answer their own questions.

Chapter 20

Parenting an LD Child

Parenting a child with a learning disability when a parent has a learning disability can be one of the most bonding relationships in your life. Molly, my wife, tells me that my daughter, Jessica, and I have a special bond—as well as ESP. Parenting can be a very difficult situation because very often we see our child dealing with similar problems and issues that we had. For many of us, our emotions surrounding these issues are still very close to the top. This can be magnified if both parents are LD, if one parent is not willing to take part in parenting the child or if you are a single parent.

Many parents with LD find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to help their own child with homework. The inability to help your child with his or her homework does not mean that you are a bad parent. It means that you are unable to help your child with homework. This does not mean that your child does not do the homework or you do not have a part in it. Your role is to arrange for someone else to help your child at regular times on specific days, as needed. This can be a support teacher, an older sibling, another parent, a grandparent, or a neighborhood high school or college student that you hire to perform this function.

Another important aspect of parenting a child with learning disabilities is advocacy. You should

not fight your child's battles; you need to be an advocate. Your child will need assistance interfacing with all those big people in his or her world with its insurmountable systems, such as the school system, which we have all faced in the past. This does not mean that teachers or the school system are the enemy. It means that a society that feels all children must learn in the same way and the same fashion on the same day needs a reality check, and you can be that reality check.

It is essential for us to know where our abilities start and end. That is why I have never gone alone to parent/teacher conferences for either of my children. I feel it is essential for both parents to attend a parent/teacher conference. If one parent is not available, another advocate can come along—a trusted friend or relative. The child should also attend. This eliminates the “they said, we said, you said” situation that sometimes takes place later.

Parenting goes way beyond the “three Rs.” The statement I am about to make will raise a few eyebrows, particularly in the circle of education. The skills of reading, writing, spelling and math can be improved at any age. The belief that these things must be mastered by the time we finish twelve years of school at the age of eighteen is simply not true. In addition, the inability to master all these subjects has caused a great nuisance in the lives of many people.

I personally feel that what cannot be learned later in life are basic principles and values—honesty, fairness and compassion. These values and prin-

ciples are not taught by someone writing on a blackboard, lecturing to you, making you read in a book or having you copy something a thousand times; they are taught by parent modeling.

The saying that "parents are the first teachers" is 100% correct. Adolph Hitler created the most horrifying killing machine of modern time. He had a tremendous amount of people working with him who could read, write and spell very well. However, they were lacking greatly in the values and principles of honesty, fairness and compassion.

Modeling principles and values to our children is the most important thing that we do as parents. Don't sell yourself short just because you cannot help your child with activities such as reading, writing and spelling. Pride yourself in the ability to model and to instill in your children the things that are really important.

Chapter 21

The Dyslexic Imposture Complex

Bill is a successful service station operator who lives in a suburban community of approximately 30,000. He has been in business for several years and is known for his reasonable costs, good work, knowledge about automobiles, honesty and willingness to pay attention to detail. The local business community knows him as a hard worker.

Bill started his business when the economy was poor. If you work for Bill, you are considered fortunate. His friends in the community think of him as a good husband and father. He is active in many civic organizations.

Bill's wife is very helpful with the business. She handles the billing, accounts receivable, answers the phone and handles all written correspondence.

On Bill's birthday his employees decided to surprise him and took him to lunch at a local restaurant. When Bill arrived, he was met by shouts of "Happy Birthday." The restaurant was decorated with balloons and streamers. He was directed to a particular seat of honor and presented with his favorite beverage, handed a menu and asked what he wanted to eat.

Bill looked at the menu and said, "What's the special?" Everyone laughed. He then stated, "I don't know what I want to eat. What is my lovely wife going to have?"

She looked up, smiled at Bill and said, "I think you would like the ribs."

Bill smiled and said, "Then that's what I'll have."

No one knows that Bill cannot read. This is not an unusual picture. If this sounds like you, you are not alone. Bill is a composite of many learning disabled people that I know in the community. They are successful business people and parents, as well as members of society.

The fact that Bill has chosen to keep the fact that he cannot read a secret between him and his wife is Bill's prerogative. However, Bill does demonstrate what I call the "dyslexic imposture complex." He has a tremendous amount of evidence that he is intelligent, successful and popular. He also harbors a lot of evidence from his past life and from what just happened that suggests he is stupid.

Is Bill stupid? Obviously not. However, this is what fights within Bill on a daily basis. He has evidence that he is intelligent; on the other hand, within him he has a lot of evidence that he is stupid.

This pulls within many of us on a daily basis—the "dyslexic imposture complex."

Chapter 22

The Need for Recreation

Recreation is an essential part of a healthy, balanced life. If you are dyslexic, as I am, you may read the word "recreation" as "re-creation." This would be an appropriate interpretation of the word.

Recreation is a time to re-create. We recharge our batteries and fulfill those needs that cannot be fulfilled in our regular school work or career. Unfortunately, for many of us who have to put in additional time at our jobs or at school, the time for recreation becomes even more crowded.

Studies show that individuals, no matter what our educational level or career, need to take time for recreation. If this time is not taken, we become less efficient in our career or studies.

I challenge you to do the following: Make a written or mental list of the five things which you do for recreation, starting with the most important down to the least important. Go ahead, make your list, I'll wait.

Do you have your list of five things? Good!

If you were unable to come up with five things that you do for recreation, you certainly need to do some additional thinking on this topic.

Now go through your list, starting with the least important to the most important. Make a note on the paper—or a mental note—listing the last

time you have done each item. Next look at the two things which are most important to you. Ask yourself, "When was the last time I did this?" If you cannot recall, you need to stop right now and schedule time to do these two things.

If you do not make time for recreation, your life is not in balance; your life is not as healthy as it could be. If you do not have time for recreation in your busy schedule, then I suggest you schedule time to be sick.

Remember, people that make time for recreation are more efficient at their job or school; they are also happier during those times at work and school. In addition, it is a recorded fact that they are sick less.

Chapter 23

Looking from the Outside In

About two years ago, a local paper decided to do an article about me and my first book. The interview for the article lasted about two hours. The journalist was a young college student having his first practical experience writing for a local newspaper. I must admit he did conduct a very good interview.

A theme we kept touching on were the issues I had as a young person which centered around belonging. I did not feel that I belonged in school, in sports, the debate team or anywhere.

A few weeks later, when the article came out, it was entitled "Looking From the Outside In." "Looking from the outside in" is a common theme among learning disabled or dyslexic individuals. We often feel we do not belong to any particular group. When you explore where this feeling comes from, it very often has to do with our experiences in school. If you are clumsy like I am, you do not only feel scholastic rejection but are unable to do well in the sports that many young people enjoy. Consequently, many people start developing a life-style around "looking from the outside in."

Many people believe that their choices of belonging are few; therefore, to avoid loneliness they

choose belonging to a group whose behavior is negative in nature, such as a gang or hanging around a local tavern every night.

The belief that there are only a few groups or circles of people to belong to in our society today is a myth. Surrounding us are thousands of circles filled with marvelous, wonderful people that are willing to welcome us into their circle. Actually, most people belong to many circles.

If you are tired of feeling like you are "looking from the outside in," the first step that must be taken is to make your presence known. Most of the circles that are worth your time will not invite you to attend; you invite yourself. This is done by being friendly and showing an interest in the goals of the circle.

You can belong in many circles at the same time and still be loyal to each one of them. An excellent place to start feeling that you belong is in your own community. The biggest complaint that people have about their neighbors is, "They do not talk to me." Studies show that when this is explored further, the neighbor has the same complaint.

Talking first and showing an interest is a skill. Some people are born with this skill; most of us have to acquire it. One acquires this skill, not by wishing, but by doing.

To start this skill, I challenge you to talk first the next time you meet someone; see what happens.

Chapter 24

Picking a Therapist

Picking a therapist is different than picking a tutor. Basically, there are two reasons why you would feel the need to see a therapist.

You may want to have someone evaluate your learning disability. Any good evaluation of a learning disability needs to have four aspects:

1. It validates the fact that you do or do not have a learning disability.
2. It addresses the specific type of learning disability you have.
3. It discusses how it can and does manifest itself in your life.
4. It shows how you learn best.

The other reason why you may seek out a therapist—a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychotherapist (depending on the licensing of your state)—is that you cannot deal with all the emotional aspects in your life that can accompany a learning disability.

To start looking for a therapist, consider a referral from another health care professional, a professional organization or a good friend.

First of all, determine if this therapist is appropriately licensed by your particular state. In some

states you can call the licensing board to check for any complaints or existing litigation against this person.

It is also important to conduct an interview. After all, you must feel comfortable before you start "baring" your personal issues. The therapist who is going to help you facilitate understanding your personal issues needs a good understanding of learning disabilities. Can this individual, to your satisfaction, define what a learning disability is?

Does he or she understand that a learning disability can affect many aspects of life? If you feel you may have issues around tactile defensiveness, does this therapist know what tactile defensiveness is? And, who is going to pay for this?

In many cases, third party reimbursers will pay for these sessions. Is this payment acceptable to the therapist? Are there any additional hidden costs to you? For how many sessions will your third-party reimbursers pay?

When you enter therapy, remember that the relationship is a partnership. To enter the relationship with the expectation that the therapist is going to "fix" you is not reasonable. Dealing with personal issues takes time and effort. Any therapy conducted needs to be kept confidential, and the therapist should be held to that expectation.

No one should be ashamed of entering therapy. It shows that you have enough knowledge and internal fortitude to face your own issues.

Chapter 25

Concerning that "Chip on Your Shoulder"

Many people go through life with what we call a "chip on their shoulder." Some people call this an attitude. Many who have a "chip on their shoulder" will clearly state that they do not feel responsible for putting it there. This may be true; however, if the chip is still on your shoulder today, who is responsible?

A "chip on your shoulder" or an attitude can be compared to prejudice. When I make this comparison, some people get very angry, because they insist they are not prejudiced in any way, shape or form. If you go to *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, prejudice is defined as "perceived opinion—usually unfavorable. An unjustifiable and unreasonable bias." Does prejudice and a "chip on your shoulder" sound the same? It sure does to me.

How does this manifest itself in everyday life? You cannot tell anything to these people. If they are on a committee, the rest of the committee members may as well walk out and go back to their regular jobs. After all, these people know everything. If he or she is your boss, you may notice that on his or her desk there are pencils with no erasers; they

never make any mistakes. This is an individual that seems to have two rules in life: (1) I am always right, and (2) if I am wrong, refer to rule number 1.

People with "chips on their shoulders" will have constant collisions with teachers, bosses, co-workers—even the police. Anyone who represents authority will bring forward the "attitude." These individuals can be completely devastating to self-help groups; even though they are members, they know what everyone else should do. No matter how earnest and dedicated the self-help group is, in the eyes of the chip carrying person, they cannot possibly do anything right.

Does this sound like anyone you have met? Anyone you know? Or does this sound like you?

Chapter 26

The Advantages of Being Dyslexic

In the mid-1990s I worked at a center designed to help young adults with long-term mental illness return to the community. During a Thanksgiving celebration, each of the individuals were asked to tell something for which they were thankful. Most people were thankful for the nice weather, the new job, family and so forth. However, one man's comment made a lasting impression on me. He said he was thankful for his mental illness, because it taught him to see further. My first thought was, "This man is really confused." After speaking with him and thinking about what he said, however, I learned that indeed his statement was true.

I then asked some of my clients who are severely physically handicapped about this issue. Many of them stated, "Yes, indeed, their disability taught them to see further." When people are able to say this and to see the advantages of their disabilities, they have emotionally come to grips with and understand the nature of their disabilities. This is also true for us with a learning disability or dyslexia.

When I have discussed this topic in various situations, some people are completely stymied. They have no understanding of what I am saying and look at me like I have lobsters coming out of my ears.

There are many advantages to being dyslexic or learning disabled. I will name just a few. I am not the only one who claims this; many other people whom I have met that have a learning disability or are dyslexic agree with me.

1. A picture-type memory. Not a photographic memory, but a picture-type memory. I can recall situations from my early childhood in the form of a movie. I can tell you what the conversation was, what you were wearing, where you were standing and what the weather was like. I was surprised when I learned that other people do not recall things or store things in their memory in this fashion. I then realized that this type of memory was a gift!

This type of memory also leads to incredible problem-solving ability. It fosters the ability to be mechanically inclined, because the mind is able to visualize how something works. Several friends of mine who are dyslexic or have other learning disabilities are mechanics. They can tear apart an engine or a mechanical device, fix the broken part and reassemble it to its working condition without benefit of a diagram. This can also be an advantage in the area of art—the ability to create.

2. Increased verbal skills. This is not present in all people with dyslexia or other learning disabilities. However, many individuals do report being verbally gifted. If you are gifted with verbal skills, it must be tempered with compassion and understanding. My verbal abilities have gotten me into trouble more than once. I am generally

the first person to yell, "The emperor has no clothes!" only to find that many individuals are completely satisfied with a naked emperor.

3. Deeper insight with empathy. This is the ability to see into situations and to feel what another person is feeling.
4. There are two other areas which most people see as a deficit. If treated with insight and understanding, however, they can be used to your advantage. They are (a) impulsiveness and (b) the ability to pay attention to more than one thing at the same time. Some people call this attention deficit.

If you did not understand what I just said in this chapter, you are not alone. If you did understand what I just said, you are becoming comfortable with yourself. You are ready to use your learning disability as an ability, not a disability.

Chapter 27

The Abuse of Alcohol and Illegal Drugs

This chapter may very well be the shortest one in the book. To say too much about this topic may confuse some of you or even offer a smoke screen to hide behind.

As a general rule, when there is a problem with alcohol or illegal drug abuse, the person doing the abusing is generally the last one to realize there is a problem.

Let me paint you a very graphic picture of this particular issue. For a three-year period I worked as an occupational therapist in an outpatient methadone clinic. Methadone is a medication used in the treatment of opiate addiction. All of the clients I had told me they thought their opiate use was under control in the beginning of their addiction process, only to realize later that it was not. They were the last ones to realize they did not have this abuse under control.

One of the rules to belong to this particular treatment program was you had to submit to a random urine test. Some clients, however, continued to abuse illegal drugs. There were cases where

individuals would pay money for someone else's clean urine.

When it was suspected that a client was bringing in someone else's urine, they had to give what was known as an "observed" urine specimen. This meant that a staff member would have to observe the client depositing the urine into a cup.

Some men went so far as to find clean urine, put it in a condom, put the condom over their own penis and put a pinhole in the end of the condom. When pretending to give a urine specimen, they would squeeze the urine from the condom into the cup.

Does this sound like someone who has their abuse under control? I think not.

Bottom line: If you think or have been told that you are abusing alcohol or illegal drugs, you need to stop. If you think you have a problem with illegal drug or alcohol abuse, you probably do. You need to get some help.

End of chapter!

Chapter 28

Victim or Survivor

Please listen carefully to what I am about to say; decide for yourself which one you are or would like to be.

A victim is a person that says, "This happened. Woe is me; isn't this awful. Look at what my life is like because of my dyslexia or other learning disability. I want nothing more than for those who have done me wrong in the past to apologize—and best if done publicly. This is why I cannot fully participate in life and become the things that I want to become, do the things that I want to do and have the relationships that I deserve. Above all, I am going to fight 'tooth and nail' not to forgive."

A survivor says, "This happened. I am coming forward to set the record straight. I am coming forward to do my best to insure that this never happens to anyone again. And despite my issues in the past, I am going to pick up my sticks; I am going to move forward. Even though it may be an extremely difficult task, I will do my best to forgive."

Which one of these do you choose to be? The choice is completely up to you. I have observed that there is no shortage of victims in this world. They come in all shapes and sizes. Victims usually are stuck, angry and no fun. Survivors, on the other hand, are on the move, sharp and usually a lot of fun. The choice is yours.

Chapter 29

The Little Train of "I Wish I Woulda"

Once there was a train that lived in a great valley. The little train's life was not unhappy-nor was it happy. It just was.

Every day the little train, along with his friends, would listen to the stories of the mighty steam engines. These were stories about pulling mighty loads out on the valley, over the hill and onto the great plains, with glorious mountains in the distance.

That evening when the little train was entering the roundhouse for the night, he imagined himself as a mighty steam engine returning to the valley having had a great experience and receiving much attention. He closed his eyes and said, "I wish I woulda."

The next day, while pulling a small important—but unimportant—load around the valley, another mighty steam engine arrived with a roar. The train was covered with something the little train had never seen before. The mighty steam engine, with one mighty puff, blew steam from his engine. This caused the substance to disappear.

"What was that?!" the little train exclaimed with a shout.

"Why, that was frost from the mountain top," the mighty steam engine boasted proudly.

"Oh-h-h, I wish I woulda," the little train expressed from his heart. "Tell me more, because someday I will go there, as soon as I have courage enough to pull my own load out of the valley."

The little train then closed his eyes and saw in his mind the day when he would leave the valley. He took a mighty breath, blew steam from his sides and yearned, "I wish I woulda!"

The day came when the little train had his chance to pull his own weight out of the valley, so he could see for himself what lay beyond. Early that morning, when most were asleep, he attached his cars and with a grandiose tug began to pull his own load out of the valley. When he was half way up the hill, he thought that all should see him as he pulled and ascended over the hill and out of the valley. He took a great breath and made a sound through his whistle that woke everyone. They looked up and saw the most glorious sight; they saw the little train pulling with all his might.

Almost two-thirds of the way up the hill the little train began to quiver. Strange and frightening thoughts began to appear in his head. What if I do not like the great plain? What if the mountains really are not there? What if I should jump the track and lay injured away from the valley? Would anyone help?

He then yelled to the fireman to throw in more coal to create a mighty head of steam. Then all at once he blew it from his sides, creating a cloud so

large that no one could see. During the confusion the little train threw himself into reverse and returned to the valley floor. As the cloud cleared and everyone saw the little train, he was heard to say, "I wish I woulda."

The rest of the little train's day was spent pulling small important—but unimportant—loads around the valley. In his work people thought they could hear the little train say, "I wish I would. I wish I would. I wish I woulda."

Then one day a strange rumor began to spread. It was a story about a large, stronger, more efficient engine. As time went on, the rumor was true. The little train, along with his friends, were placed in a scrap yard awaiting their demise. The trains told stories of times past; these stories were about great adventures out of the valley, into the plains and over the mountains to the sea.

As the scrap yard people moved closer and lit their cutting torches, everyone knew that their time was over. The little train took one last sigh and muttered under his breath, "I wish I woulda."

Chapter 30

"Why Am I Here?"

The question "Why am I here?" goes all the way back to when people first discovered that they indeed existed. It is my personal point of view that instead of *a* reason for being here, there are *many* reasons. I feel that many people look too far when it comes to answering this question. They seem to have an expectation that one major role will be accomplished that will give them worldwide recognition and turn the tide of our society.

I challenge you to look at this question in another way. What are the things you have already accomplished? All too often, the things that seem routine to us can be great accomplishments to other people. For instance, think about the individual who conducts his or her life with honesty in every aspect. What about the person who has striven in the past to be a good parent? All too often we do not give ourselves credit for the things we have already accomplished.

The ability to answer the question "Why am I here?" presents itself at different times, different ages and different stages in our lives. As our own life experiences and knowledge increase, this capability continues to change and, hopefully, grow.

Is it possible that one of the reasons why you are here is not for yourself? What are the issues and who are the people that you are affecting today who will someday go on to make other changes for the positive? If you have not yet discovered the reasons why you are here, perhaps you are looking too hard. Remember to be patient with yourself.

Very often the reasons why we are here reveal themselves at a moment when we are least expecting them.

Chapter 31

Pick Your Battles Carefully

The title "Pick Your Battles Carefully" could also read "Pick Your Causes Carefully." There are thousands of causes with which one can be involved, and they all have great merit. However, you only have so much time, energy and knowledge to contribute to these causes. Also, if you enter at full gallop without knowledge about the cause, you may do more damage than good; or you could later discover that the cause was not what you thought it was.

At one time I had a client who was involved with so many causes you could not count them on all your fingers and toes. The bottom line of all this effort was that he was not doing justice to any of them. I was finally able to convince him to narrow his causes down to three, which made him more effective in these organizations. It also gave him back some of his own personal time.

Think about the cause of learning disabilities. Personally, I feel that this is a worthy cause. I do not expect everyone to embrace this particular cause with the same enthusiasm that I do.

When you decide to become involved with a particular organization, it is your obligation to learn as much about the organization as possible. As a member of that organization, remember that you

will represent it to the public at large. If you do not represent the organization correctly, you may do it an extreme disservice.

In the early 1980s I was quite active with an organization that advocated for learning disabled adults. A small number of the membership decided to approach other organizations as representatives of our organization. They had the enthusiasm; they had the compassion; but they did not have the knowledge. As a result, they misrepresented our organization while seeking funding for us to continue our work. By their lack of knowledge, they managed to destroy relationships and funding sources.

I am not telling you this story to scare you or to talk you out of joining organizations. When you do join an organization, however, pick your battle or your cause. Pick it carefully. Know what your expectations are. Find out what you are expected to know. You also need to understand your own energy and time limits.

It takes many days for skilled masons to lay the foundation of a mighty barn. It also takes several days for skilled carpenters to build the remainder of the structure. In addition, much input is needed from other skilled trades people, such as electricians, plumbers, painters and roofers. Several days, if not weeks and months, are needed to construct a fine barn.

It only takes one loose jackass a few minutes to kick it down!

Chapter 32

The Public Library— Your Best Friend

Many people with a dyslexia or other learning disabilities shun the public library like it is the plague. For many of us, the library in school was a place of near torture; it was a place where we were forced to try to read, to hold still and not talk.

Thankfully, my community library is completely different. I do not know how many times I have had individuals crying on my shoulder because they cannot afford good sources of information, such as the internet or books on tape.

They always seem amazed when I tell them that these services are present in their back hip pocket—through their public library card. Public libraries are very much alive. If you shun books, do not overlook the massive amount of tapes and CDs. These tapes and CDs will offer you both books and music. I was able to finally read, by way of tapes, the great philosophers of the world. My library is also on the internet. I can become active on the internet at no cost to me.

Do not forget your best friend at the library—the resource librarian. In most libraries this person is underpaid for the job he or she does and is probably educationally overqualified for the job descrip-

tion. The resource librarian spends most of his or her time taking care of things for which he or she is not trained, such as chasing rowdy teenagers out of the library. Consequently, the resource librarian will be delighted when you come with an intelligent question.

If you have not been to your local public library for some time, check it out. It costs you nothing—only your tax dollars. You may find that the public library can be your best friend.

Chapter 33

“Exploder” or “Imploder”

Everyone knows what an explosion is, but not everyone knows what an implosion is. Implosion is what demolition experts do to old buildings that are no longer wanted. Contrary to what many people believe, demolition experts do not explode old buildings; they implode them. This means the charges are placed in such a specific pattern that the building collapses upon itself when the charges are ignited.

Both explosion and implosion have benefits for dealing with a variety of problems in society. However, if explosion and implosion are applied to dealing with stress and personal problems, they can be devastating.

Exploders are individuals who allow anger and pressure to build to a point where they feel the need to explode. This type of behavior can be devastating to people around them, to the community and to society as a whole. Very often “exploders” find their way into the court system and, if taken to the extreme, into the prison system.

Imploders let pressure and anger build on the inside until an internal explosion takes place. This behavior is very detrimental to their psychic health, as well as to their physical health. Imploders often find their way into mental health services or medi-

cal doctors' offices with a variety of symptoms, such as headaches or ulcers.

Neither implosion nor explosion are healthy ways for an individual to deal with pressure and anger. But I dare say that each one of us, at different times in our lives, have dealt with our pressure and anger in one of these two ways.

If your behavior follows one of these two patterns and you wish to change, I have suggestions for you. If you do not wish to change this, I suggest you stop reading this chapter now; you are wasting your time. I do, however, firmly believe that healthy people take steps to change those things in their lives that are a nuisance or a cause of misery.

First, decide what your fuse is. Some fuses burn fast; some burn slow. Other fuses smolder for a long time before they reach their target. What is it in your life that only you can decide will shut off or at least lengthen your fuse?

For many people, a good approach to this is a regular exercise program. For some of us, coordination has always been an issue and we have shunned exercise. However, exercise can take many forms. You do not have to compete or spend large amounts of money to achieve a particular goal. Exercise can take the shape of a simple walk around the block; the key to exercise, no matter what it is, is to do it regularly. If you are going to enter an aggressive exercise program, check with your physician first.

For others, it is knowing when to stop, when to back off and when to walk away. In some cases, lack of sleep, lack of recreation and abuse of alcohol can shorten a fuse considerably.

For all of us, dealing with pressure and anger has been modeled by someone else. Has there been anyone in your life that has modeled how to deal with anger? For instance, have you ever had an explosive teacher? Or have you had a parent that swallowed all his or her pressure and anger? These are people that we have admired at different stages in our life. They may have been remarkable in other ways, but were they good models when dealing with their pressure and anger?

The good news is that, as thinking human beings, we can choose to be different!

Chapter 34

“Old Negative Memories Keep Us in the Mud”

For those of us who live with dyslexia or other learning disabilities, negative memories tend to center around issues of reading, writing and spelling. When revisiting an old memory, it can be very much like a movie—complete with lights, sound, action and old emotions. Other times old memories reappear like a tape from a tape recorder. This often happens when we are having a hard time with reading, writing, spelling or attempts to learn something new.

When negative memories surface, some people will stop and not try to move forward; thus they stay stuck in the mud. This becomes a pattern when they attempt to read, write, spell or learn any new skill.

The good news is we do not have to continue this way. Somewhere in our past we learned this behavior; we certainly can learn to be different.

When I recognize that I am revisiting old, negative memories, I tell myself to change the channel. Others visualize a computer keyboard, and they hit the delete key. You will still probably have issues with reading, writing, spelling or learning a new

skill; however, this does not mean it is impossible. If new learning was easy, we would all be a lot smarter than we are.

When negative pictures or phrases start to enter your mind and you choose to delete them or change the channel, it is best to replace them with something positive. The phrase or picture with which you replace the negative thoughts does not have to be complicated.

When learning something new, a technique used by many successful people is to first visualize the performance of the new task. Visualization is extremely powerful. When Albert Einstein attempted to develop the theory of the expanding universe, he first visualized himself riding on the head of a rocket into space. He then spent the next five to ten years researching and proving that his visualization was true. Thus, visualization is extremely important and can be a valuable tool.

And what about those negative phrases? Which are the ones that slip into your mind unexpectedly? Are they, "I'm stupid!" "I can't!" "I'm all thumbs!"? Only you know what these phrases are.

You do have the choice to delete these or change the channel and replace them with something else. Remember, the replacements do not have to be difficult. They can be as simple as, "I can!" "I am capable!" or even "I enjoy learning something new!"

Chapter 35

Recovery: A Long Process

Many people who do not have dyslexia or other learning disabilities may not realize that this particular issue affects all aspects of an individual's life. Even though a person has been diagnosed with dyslexia or a learning disability and has gone through the necessary tutoring, there can be continuing problems. Dyslexia or learning disabilities can affect work, relationships, spirituality, leisure and family.

The reason for this may center around the fear of discovery. If you are hiding dyslexia or another learning disability, you may go to great lengths to ensure that no one knows. You may even be hiding from the people who are the closest to you. Is it any wonder that many of us have a tendency to hold relationships at a distance? If you have a fear of discovery, you are not going to place yourself in a position where you can be discovered, for instance, attending a Bible study or community education class.

If you believe, because of past experiences, that you are always wrong and everyone else is always right, you will have difficulty being a supervisor in a work situation. You may refrain from joining clubs or organizations because you may be asked to read

or take minutes. It may affect relationships in families. After all, what do small children like more than to have adults read to them?

The good news is that we are human beings, and we do have the ability to change and to deal with our own fears. Self-disclosure may be your first step. It is impossible for you to be discovered if you are already known. When I disclosed that I have dyslexia, many of my family members and friends moved closer; they actually wanted to know more. My great fear of people moving away from me only happened with a few individuals.

In the organizations to which I belong, many of the people are aware of the books I have written, so they understand the fact that I am dyslexic. They understand that I do not want to stand up and read in front of the group or take notes for the records.

What about your spiritual concerns? Churches and spiritual organizations tend to be made up of caring people. Therefore, if you self-disclose your issues and fears with writing and reading, I am sure your anxiety will be treated with respect.

Do you consistently feel that other people know more than you do or have better judgment than you do? In some cases, other people may know more than you do; however, when it comes to yourself, you know best.

For instance, if you are a supervisor, it is your job to make the decisions. It is, however, completely appropriate to accept input from other people. Then the final decision is yours.

Other people do not know more than you do; other people do not have better judgment than you do. You are a capable person with a good mind; you are able to make decisions when using proper input and your own knowledge.

Claim your own power!

Chapter 36

Advocating for Yourself

The phrase "advocating for yourself" can be simplified by saying "the ability to stick up for yourself." In the Americans with Disabilities Act, "learning disabilities" is specifically stated as a disability protected under law. However, this does not mean that the Americans with Disabilities Act should be used as some sort of weapon to wave in the face of someone else, such as an employer or school administrator.

The Americans with Disabilities Act was meant to be a guideline for reasonable people to come together and follow. In the Americans With Disabilities Act, "reasonable accommodation" is specifically mentioned. This means that if the workplace, school system or community can reasonably make accommodations, it must be done.

In business an example would be allowing you more time to do your paperwork. In a school setting, allowing you to photocopy someone else's notes would be a reasonable accommodation.

An unreasonable accommodation would be demanding a very expensive computer system while you are working for a nonprofit organization with a very low budget. Another unreasonable accommodation would be demanding your own personal note taker while you are in school; this note taker would

be an employee of the school district. Most school budgets are taxed to the max.

"Reasonable accommodation" implies that both you and the system are reasonable. "Advocating" means that you are assertive and stick up for your rights; however, it does not mean that you are a Nazi storm trooper who comes in and demands things while threatening lawsuits. Reasonable people can reason together; in addition, you are blazing the trail for those learning disabled or dyslexic people that will come after you.

"Advocating for yourself" implies that with reasonable accommodation you are more than capable; it does not imply that you are the Titanic going down for the last time, taking yourself and everyone else with you!

Chapter 37

The Legend of the "Ya But" Kid

This is the story of the "ya but" kid. The "ya but" kid was a good looking kid; he was a smart kid. He lived in a place called Opportunity City. People came from all around because they heard he was the fastest one on the draw to say, "Ya but."

One day after working really hard doing a good job, people came up to the "ya but" kid and said, "You did a good job."

He responded, "Ya, but it coulda been better."

The "ya but" kid did something that was really smart. People turned and noticed. They said, "That was really smart."

He responded, "Ya, but it coulda been smarter."

One day the noon stage arrived, and a pretty girl came to town. Rumor was she was single; the "ya but" kid liked girls. He thought he might ask her for a date, but then he said, "Ya, but what if she says 'no'?"

All the people in town came to the "ya but" kid and said, "Why don't you run for town marshal? You'd be a good one."

The "ya but" kid said, "Ya, but what if I lose?" The "ya but" kid had an opportunity to see another

city—to see new places. He was heard to say, “Ya, but what if I don’t like it?”

A new club was started in town; the entire town was excited about the new organization. They asked the “ya but” kid to join, and he responded, “Ya, but what if I don’t like it.”

A new factory was constructed in town; it was the first of its kind. The owners of the factory asked the “ya but” kid to come work for them. It would be an exciting new opportunity. The “ya but” kid was heard to say, “Ya, but what if I can’t do it?”

A marvelous new school was built to teach—for the first time—a new subject. The “ya but” kid was personally asked to be its first student. The “ya but” kid said, “Ya, but what if I flunk out?”

The “ya but” kid was a good looking kid; he was a smart kid. He was good at one thing, because he practiced it a hundred times a day. That was saying, “Ya but.”

This is the legend of the “ya but” kid.

Chapter 38

Mr. Clown, Mr. Trouble or Mr. Ghost

It is my observation that many of us decide to take on one of the following three characters in the classroom. All three appear different, but all are intended to have the same outcome—to avoid being called upon to read, write or spell.

Mr. Clown becomes extremely skillful at being exactly that. He is the individual that makes everyone in the classroom laugh—sometimes even the teacher. If the pressure is rising, Mr. Clown becomes even more cynical and expounds even further. His goal is to keep the opportunity to read, write or spell at a distance, even if it means being taken from the room. Very often Mr. Clown will continue this behavior for the entire time he is in school; he will always be on stage.

The next person is Mr. Trouble. The approach is different, but the expected outcome is the same. Mr. Trouble wishes to avoid being embarrassed by his inability to read, write or spell. He also becomes very adept. If you include kindergarten, Mr. Trouble has had thirteen years to hone his skill. He is not difficult to spot; Mr. Trouble is often warming a chair outside the principal's office. Within his school and community, he is preceded by a reputation.

Our third individual is Mr. Ghost. Very often you do not know he is even there. Mr. Ghost's goal

is to make sure that the teacher will not see him, so he will be overlooked when it is time to read, write or spell. After Mr. Ghost leaves the system, the only evidence of his presence is an aging attendance record locked away in some file.

I am not saying that everyone who presents any of these three types of behavior has dyslexia or another learning disability; however, I do note that it is a survival mechanism which many of us use throughout our school years. It is much easier on our psychics to be thrown out of class for hilarious antics or for causing trouble. It is even easier not to be noticed at all.

All too often these behaviors are carried into adulthood, particularly into the workplace. They are not hard to spot.

Mr. Clown will probably be the one who constantly attempts to be funny and who makes light of any general rules or expectations, particularly when they relate to reading, writing or spelling. He will be the person who has not read the employee's handbook because, after all, "the whole thing will be changed at any minute."

Mr. Trouble is the individual who is always testing the limits and constantly challenging the hierarchy of the company. He is the worst person to have in any type of classroom situation, such as continuing education. This person will do his best to sabotage whatever the instructor is trying to do.

And let's not forget Mr. Ghost. We almost forgot he was there! This is the individual who may work in a job for 30 to 40 years. The only reason

you know Mr. Ghost is around is because his name is present on the time card which is submitted every two weeks.

Mr. Clown, Mr. Trouble and Mr. Ghost are dealing the best they can with what they perceive is a threat. This threat is that they may be asked to read, write or spell and will not be able to perform.

We do need Mr. Clown at different times. He can help us deal with stress and tension in the classroom, as well as in the workplace.

Mr. Trouble is sometimes needed when the status quo becomes too much of the status quo, and it continues to blindly move forward without question. There are times when a little trouble is in order to help organizations take a good look at themselves.

Mr. Ghost can also be important. Sometimes it is helpful to shut up and comply so the entire system, school or workplace, can move forward to accomplish a common goal.

It should logically follow that it is possible for their also to be a Ms. Clown, Ms. Trouble and Ms. Ghost.

To be stuck in one of these roles because you are fearful is not beneficial to the school system, the workplace or the individual. It is essential to deal with the real issue. Becoming Mr. Clown, Mr. Trouble or Mr. Ghost may be a choice that we make. It can be a right choice as long as the reasons for making that choice are of a positive nature. To hide behind these behaviors, however, will cause us to spend too much time on Sycamore Street.

Chapter 39

Learning Disabilities and Dyslexia: The Center of a Wheel with Many Spokes

When I was in graduate school, I interviewed many learning disabled adults in depth for a research project. I determined from this study that every one of these individuals appeared to fall into one of the three following groups:

1. The successful group. Despite their disabilities, these individuals perceived their lives to be successful. Their success was in the workplace, with relationships and in interfacing with the community at large. Above all, these people ranked themselves as generally feeling happy.
2. The student group. This group, for the most part, had recently discovered as adults or young adults that they were dyslexic or had a learning disability. They were in the process of taking steps to advocate for themselves, as well as to expand their insight into their own learning disability. They ranked themselves as generally happy; it was my observation that every one of them was moving in the direction of the successful group.

3. The ambiguous group. These people were identified as having a learning disability; however, it was quite obvious that they did not have much insight. They also had several other issues; many of them had problems with chemical dependency, job performance and relationships. These people often reported their lives to be unhappy and chaotic.

The good news is that we are human beings and not wheels. However, a wheel does draw a nice picture for those of us whose minds are visual. When it comes to people, one of the best ways to adjust the center of our wheel is through insight and acceptance. If you are reading this, you must be on your way to the student group or the successful group. Otherwise, you probably would not be interested in this book.

When the center of the wheel is placed back in its proper position, the spokes will need additional adjustments. If you have an issue around chemicals, you need to continue using the support system that works for you, such as AA. If you are having problems in your relationships, you must continue to deal with those relationships.

It is up to you. The hub is yours; the spokes are yours; the wheel is yours. The farther you can roll without wobbling, the happier you will be.

Chapter 40

The Potluck of Life

All too often I hear life referred to as the “banquet of life.” That picture is not good enough for me. I view banquets as having a main course prepared by somebody else. There is a head table, as well as meaningless ritual and protocol. Then there are many speeches which are followed by meaningless awards.

I like to view life as a potluck. Generally potlucks have no main course—just many dishes. Each one is as delightful as the last one. This is followed by numerous homemade desserts. There is no head table; people serve themselves and sit down wherever they choose—sometimes even on the floor. There is little protocol; you are even allowed to eat the dessert first. Usually there are no speeches, and the awards are simply gained by partaking. With the exception of a few, everyone brings something to a potluck.

What is it that you bring to the potluck of life? Do you bring a marvelous dish that people are just waiting to try? Or do you bring several fabulous dishes? Do you surprise everyone with the most unusual combination of ingredients? Or do you bring the sweet dessert that compels people to come back for another taste? Or are you the individual that brings little or nothing?

Too Much Time on Sycamore Street

You are invited to the potluck of life. What you bring is up to you; what you choose to share is up to you. If you choose to bring nothing, that is also up to you.

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Chapter 41

Willy the Carpenter

Willy was a carpenter; he liked to help build houses. One day his foreman sent him to a job site to put the roof on a house. When Willy arrived, he saw a pile of 2 x 4s and a box of nails. He opened up his tool box and saw a saw—and only a saw. He then took the saw from the tool box and sawed all the 2 x 4s in half.

The next day Willy was told to go to another job site and put the shingles on a roof. When he arrived, he saw a pile of shingles and a box of long staples. Once again he opened up his tool box and saw a saw—and only a saw. He then sawed all the shingles in half.

The next morning Willy's foreman sent word that he wanted to see him. The foreman wanted to meet Willy on the long bench in front of the work site. When Willy arrived, he saw the foreman sitting at one end of the bench. He sat at the other end.

Willy expected praise for his hard work; however, the foreman demanded an explanation. Why had Willy cut the 2 x 4s and shingles in half? Willy became angry; after all, he had worked hard. He opened up his tool box and saw a saw—and only a saw. He took out the saw and sawed the bench in half.

The story of Willy is fiction; I want to use Willy to make a point. How many of you are going through life as Willy? Are you attempting to deal with all of your issues and problems with only one tool? Are you attempting to saw them in half? Wouldn't it have been more beneficial for Willy to have a variety of tools in his toolbox?

This is very similar to life and its problems. If your only tool is to be quiet and withdrawn, you will deal with all of your issues in that manner. If your only tool is to become angry and full of rage, that is how you will deal with life's problems-and you may alienate everyone around you. If your only tool is a bottle of alcohol, that is what you will use.

A well-balanced person, like a skilled carpenter, has a variety of well-kept, honed tools in his or her toolbox. These tools can be taken out at the appropriate time for the appropriate task.

Is it time to check your own toolbox? How many tools do you have in there? Are there very many? Are they rusty? Or is it time to add a few more?

Chapter 42

"Do Unto Yourself as You Would Do Unto Others"

The title of this chapter is not a misprint or dyslexic reversal but a true statement for many of us. Would you ever walk up to someone, look at that person and say, "You are stupid, ugly and fat! Now please turn around so I can kick you!" This is what many of us do to ourselves on a regular basis.

In my lifetime I have heard thousands of sermons by preachers claiming to be reciting the words of God. Never once have I hear God proclaim, "You're stupid; you're ugly; you're fat; now please turn around so I can kick you!" Is it possible that we are harder on ourselves than the deity?

Many of us give other people more respect than we give ourselves. Is it not time to start living under a new rule "Do unto yourself as you would do unto others?"

Do you put yourself down before you know it, faster than a bum on a bologna sandwich? Do you kick yourself before you think? Old rules die hard, and they only go away if replaced with something different.

At some point in your life, you learned to talk to yourself in a negative way. The good news is that what once was learned can be unlearned and replaced with something new.

Only you can decide to make this change. Only you have the power. Are you willing to make the change and to claim your power?

Chapter 43

Dyslexia and Learning Disabilities: Excellent Company in Which to Be

I always chuckle quietly when I hear a teacher lecturing students to study harder so they can get good grades; otherwise, they will never achieve the things that people like Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Nelson Rockefeller, Woodrow Wilson or Winston Churchill did. I chuckle because the people the teacher mentioned all were dyslexic. This means that these great men were more like the students than they were like the teacher.

Even more impressive to me are the people I have met since I started public speaking and writing about learning disabilities. I wish to mention a few:

The executive vice president in Chicago who cannot read a lunch menu when he goes to lunch with his peers. He is in charge of hundreds of people and millions of dollars worth of development.

The car salesman in Omaha who cannot fill out a job application. However, give him a few minutes and he can sell an anchor to a drowning sailor.

The teacher in Minneapolis who left teaching to start her own business. She now teaches learning disabled and dyslexic people how to advocate for themselves.

The mechanic in Cleveland, Ohio who can tear apart a broken automobile transmission, fix the broken part and return it to working order—all without the benefit of a diagram.

The three medical physicians I have met who live in various parts of the United States. They are not only medical doctors; they are specialists in their chosen fields.

What is the common thread that runs through these people?

1. They live in the United States of America—a country that provides opportunity. Since its conception, the United States has been a country of opportunity. This does not imply, however, that opportunity will simply fall into your lap. It must be preceded by hard work.
2. These people seem to have an enormous amount of energy.
3. They are able to use their imagination.
4. They all could identify someone in their present or past that believed in them. Although they were not necessarily relatives, each of them could identify such a mentor.

If you feel there is no one in your life that fills this void, remember that someone cared to write this book and you are reading it—or someone is reading it to you.

5. They feel that they have had the opportunity to contribute something significant of themselves to society.

Are you willing to add your name to this list of people?

I wish to close this chapter as I have closed many of the others. The choice is yours.

Chapter 44

The Ability to Change

The good news about change is that human beings are able to change. The bad news is that we are very resistant to change.

Let's look at the issue of shyness. It is important not to confuse shy persons with quiet persons. Shy persons will not protest when they feel their rights have been violated, someone else's rights have been violated or something is significantly wrong. Quiet persons will protest if they feel it is necessary.

A shy person may say, "I wish I could be different, but it just doesn't feel like me when I speak up." The answer to this is, "The reason why it does not feel like you is that it is not you—yet." Speaking up, for a shy person, is a new skill. When we first learn a new skill, it will not feel normal. That is why we need to practice.

If you are a shy person, practice can take place in the presence of another person. It may help to practice your new skill with a good friend. Or you can force yourself to speak at a time you normally would keep quiet—for instance, offer your opinion.

The ability to change does not only apply to those who are shy. It applies to all of us. We all have something in our lives that we want to change. If there is nothing in your life that you wish to change,

either you are lying to yourself or you are the world's most fortunate person.

Most of us, because of our dyslexia or other learning disability, would like to read better. However, we believe we cannot change. This is a myth. It stays alive because of our past experiences and fears.

You do have the ability to change. You may need to enlist the assistance of friends or a tutor, but you can make the changes in your life you decide to make. Change starts from the inside and moves outward. The first step toward change is the internal decision to do so.

Chapter 45

"I Will Love Myself When . . ."

Many people misunderstand the word "love." All too often people confuse the word "love" with "lust." Madison Avenue would desperately like to give us the impression that they can sell love. Unfortunately, the best they can do is sell us products that satisfy our lust. They cannot even come close to selling us love.

To attempt to define the word "love" in this short chapter would do the word a disservice. The endeavor would fill another book, and in the end you would still have to decide what the word means to you. If you are still dealing with your own definition of love and find it is easier to replace the word "love" with "like" in this chapter, feel free to do so.

Ask people the question, "Do you love yourself?" The answer may be "No," followed by a list of reasons. The list is generally made up of "toos" and "can'ts." "I am too fat." "I am too skinny." "I am too dumb." "I am too smart." And there is the following: "I can't spell." "I can't read." "I can't write." This is often accompanied by, "I will be lovable when. . . ." "I will be lovable when I learn to read." "I will be lovable when I learn to spell." "I will be lovable when I learn to write." "I will be lovable when I lose weight." "I will be lovable when

I grow taller." "I will be lovable when I have clear skin." "I will be lovable when I win the lottery." Many people have had years of practice presenting themselves in this manner, and they have taught themselves well.

Is it any wonder that many people, when presented with their own picture, cannot stand looking at it? Or, when listening to themselves on a tape recorder, cannot stand the sound of their own voices? So we ask, "Why am I lovable?"

The answer is *because you are*. When you hear this simple statement, do you immediately grasp your list of reasons and start reciting them in your mind? The carpenter from Galilee says, "The truth shall set you free." In this case, the truth is that you are lovable.

There are two factors in accepting this truth: (1) understanding the fact that you are lovable and (2) believing it!

Understanding is in the head; believing is in the heart. I may understand that my favorite pet died, but I do not yet believe it. It will take additional work and processing for me to truly believe it. In the same way, I may be able to understand the fact that I am lovable; I may even be able to quote this to other people. Believing, however, will take some additional work and time.

For many of us the first step is to stop reciting the negative list. We can be thinking about the negative list before we realize it. As soon as we recognize that we are repeating our negative list, we need to say "Stop!" If necessary, say it out loud.

Then pick a phrase that works best for you, such as, "Stop! I don't do that anymore." Replace your negative list with a positive one. This list should contain statements like "I am lovable and capable."

Another way to approach this issue is to find a picture of yourself and put it in a place where you will see it several times a day. Leave it there until you can truly say to yourself, "That is a lovable person."

Chapter 46

Assertiveness: The Express Lane

Assertiveness has been a big topic in pop psychology for some time. There have been hundreds of books written and millions of dollars made on this topic. I am going to give you the express-lane version of assertiveness.

Let's use Bob as an example. Bob receives a telephone call from his friend, Tim. Tim informs him there is a party this Friday night. Tim says it would be a good opportunity for them to meet new friends and to have some fun. Tim then asks Bob what time he is going to pick him up with the car. Bob realizes that this will be the third party this summer and the third time that he has driven.

Bob begins to yell at Tim and says, "How come I always have to drive, buy the gas and be the designated driver?" Tim retaliates with a verbal barrage, "How come you are always so selfish?" Tim slams down the receiver.

Bob discovers that he has been disconnected and also slams down the receiver. He then turns and yells at his mother about how selfish Tim always is. Bob continues shouting as he puts on his shoes and picks up his car keys. And he goes out the door to drive Tim to the party.

Bob was not assertive in this situation. He did nothing more than alienate a friend; he also turned his mother into a personal punching bag, which she did not deserve.

Assertiveness would have been better served if Bob had said to Tim, "Tim, I feel badly because it seems I have driven to the last two parties; I wish I would not have to be the designated driver this time. Do you think you could drive?"

In the above statement, Bob included four things which are essential for assertiveness: (1) He stated how he felt; (2) the message was clear; (3) he did not blame Tim; (4) the message was timely. This type of message also gave Tim opportunity to respond in an appropriate manner. Tim may have responded, "Yes it is. You've driven to the last few parties; but don't you remember that the last three times we went fishing, I have driven?"

Being timely is an important part of being assertive. A week later, we often think of something that should have been said. However, the opportunity has passed.

Most of us are aware when our buttons are being pushed—when something is said that does not agree with us. Ask yourself how important it is for you to react to this particular situation on a scale of 1 to 10. Also ask if this is going to be important to you tomorrow, next week, next month or next year.

If you realize that this is not very important to you and tomorrow it will not make a difference, perhaps you will choose not to become assertive.

On the other hand, if you do feel the situation is important and will make a difference in the future, you do need to be assertive.

Remember the four characteristics that make up assertiveness:

1. Talk about how you feel.
2. Be sure the message is clear.
3. Do not blame the other person.
4. Your statement must be timely.

Chapter 47

Crying Easily

A topic which many dyslexic or learning disabled people do not like to discuss is "crying easily." It can, however, be a major stumbling block for many people.

Many of us were unsuccessful when attempting to read, write and spell; consequently, these emotional areas can be riddled with shame, frustration and guilt. As adults, we can begin to cry when these buttons are pushed, even though the shame, frustration and guilt are anchored in our childhood.

To further complicate this, many of us were the target of ridicule and teasing by other children. Even in adulthood there are some individuals who continue to tease when they find there is a vulnerable area in a person's life. I call these people "emotional predators."

There is nothing wrong with crying. It releases emotions that have been imprisoned; it is very cleansing. Unfortunately, we do live in a society that is schizophrenic in this area. On the one hand, society says there is nothing wrong with crying. On the other hand, it says that we do not tolerate crying, particularly if you are male.

The fear of crying keeps many of us from being assertive when our rights have been violated, resulting in more anger and frustration. We may even

have a reputation of being easy going and rolling with the punches, but the opposite is true.

Is crying easily an issue in your life? Is it keeping you from expressing yourself and getting what you want? I suggest you keep reading or continue to have someone read to you and consider the following:

First, it is important to learn as much about your learning disability as possible. How does it manifest itself? What is the best way for you to learn?

It is also important for you to realize that you are not alone. Our society is peppered with people like you. You will find them in all areas of life; they are struggling with the same things you are.

Next, share with a few chosen people that you are learning disabled or dyslexic. Will it surprise you to discover that people do not move away? Many of them will move closer. Also share with a support group, a close friend or a counselor the frustration, anger and shame that has accumulated from your past experiences. You have now provided a safety valve for crying, and frustration will not be so close to the top.

The next step—which is a big one—is to learn to be assertive and speak your thoughts when you feel it is necessary. Despite the feeling that you may start to cry, be determined to get your point across this time.

I suggest that you begin with something small. For many people, expressing something as simple as a preference is a big step. Consider role playing

when preparing for a larger situation. Request the assistance of a good friend, a group member or your counselor to help you practice the scenario in which you are going to express yourself in the manner you desire.

Finally, decide to act. Make your point with a friend, relative or boss. Go to your boss and discuss the raise you did not get. Talk with your relative about the snide remark that really hurt you. The first times will be difficult, but you need to turn your practice into reality. This time you are going to do it!

There is nothing wrong with crying. However, if the fear of crying is keeping you from getting your rights, what you want, what you need and what you deserve, then it is a major stumbling block in your life. You need to address it.

Chapter 48

“How Do I Learn Best?”

People learn through their senses, and there are *six* senses—not five. All day our six senses are bombarded by millions of pieces of input, and we filter out the information that needs our attention. Some people have trouble with this filtering process and often are identified as “attention deficit.” We can learn through all six of our senses—or any combination of them.

The traditional classroom capitalizes on two of these senses—sight and sound. However, do you have visual trouble telling a lower case “d” from a lower case “b”? Do you have issues around auditory reception? For instance, you are not able to distinguish between “k” and “ch”? Then there is a good chance you will be considered learning disabled. The system will attempt to improve your learning situation by bombarding only your senses of vision and hearing, while your other four senses are functioning just fine.

Is it any wonder that some people tell us they learn best by “hands on,” not in the classroom? These are the people who utilize their other four senses to learn.

I would like to describe the six senses. Many of them are obvious. Any of the six senses can have deficits. We are then compelled to rely on the other senses while learning.

1. Sight is the ability to perceive objects through our visual field and distinguish them from their background, as well as identify them in their position in space.
2. Sound is the ability to receive auditory information that is beneficial at the time. It is also the ability to ignore sounds that are not appropriate to the task at hand. A person's inability to do this may cause him or her to be labeled "auditory deficit."
3. Taste is the mouth's ability to perceive the difference between salt, sweet, bitter and sour. Some people utilize this area by occupying their mouths while they are learning. This is evident in the classroom when students are chewing gum, chewing on pencils or biting their fingernails.
4. The ability of our olfactory system to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant odors in our environment is smell. Studies show that when learning situations are enhanced by pleasant smells, many people retain information better.
5. Touch is the ability to perceive the difference between pleasant and unpleasant sensations on our bodies. The inability to distinguish these sensations is known as "tactile defensiveness." The sense of touch is used by many people when learning. The best example of this is "learning by doing."

6. Vestibular is located in the inner ear and is known in some professions as the "Great Organizer." It is stimulated by movement. There are many people that need to move in order to learn. Unfortunately, we demand that people sit still in the classroom. This is devastating for someone who relies upon their vestibular system to learn. Think about the student who sits in the back of the classroom; all the time he or she is sitting, his or her leg is jumping up and down 100 miles per hour. Very often this student will be labeled as distracting, restless and overactive.

The truth may be that he or she is a vestibular learner who is attempting to retain information by moving a leg or some other part of the body. This student may be very successful when participating in sports; after all, the coaches discovered a long time ago that these students learn well when moving, running drills and participating on the sports' field.

These students have a difficult time in class because they are not allowed to move. Blindfold a student who is visually oriented, and expect that student to learn. Don't you think that would be foolish? Yet this is what is happening to the vestibular learner.

Now that I have described the six senses and have done my tangent on vestibular learning, I want you to determine how you learn best. Take into account the information I have just given you. An evaluation by a skilled professional can identify which one of the senses you utilize the most; how-

ever, I am confident that you have a good idea which senses are the most valuable to you when you are learning.

After you determine which senses you use the most, use this new knowledge to your benefit. If you have an alternative learning style, it does not mean that you are unable to learn. It means that the person teaching you is not presenting the information in a manner that helps you to learn.

Chapter 49

"I Get Angry so Easily"

Getting angry easily is something shared by many people—learning disabled or not. The true issue is not necessarily the anger but the behaviors that accompany it, such as verbal outbursts or violent behavior. If you feel that your anger and the resulting behavior could cause you to harm yourself or assault another person, you need to pursue professional help. This is also true if you have been told that others are afraid of your behavior when you are angry.

I have never met anyone who has a hot head or a fuse coming out of the side of his or her body. When we use these metaphors to describe people, we are really saying that these people use their anger to deal with situations in which they are not comfortable. Many of these people learned quickly that it is safer to become angry than it is to cry. If we follow our pain when we become angry, the source of the anger can usually be found.

Anger is one of our feelings. Feelings are okay. They are part of the package that makes up the human being. How we act upon our feelings is what makes the difference. For some, anger is always very close to the top. The slightest thing can make some of us angry. For others, anger rises to the surface only when everything else seems to be "going to hell in a handbasket." And there are those who

deny that they are angry and emotionally swallow it. Unfortunately, the anger will probably reappear in some other fashion, possibly as a headache or a gut ache.

If anger presents itself as a major stumbling block in your life, it is time to address it in a proactive manner. This may result in expressing your concern with a support group, a close friend or a trained professional.

Remember that anger is one of our emotions and emotions are okay. It is what you do with your anger that will make a difference to you, your loved ones and society.

Chapter 50

Responsible to Self

People often tremble inside when they hear the word "responsible." For those of us who grew up with dyslexia or another learning disability, it is a word that has been abused in an attempt to get us to cooperate and perform. "If you are responsible you will learn to read better." "If you are responsible you will sit still." "If you are responsible you will get better grades."

However, what if we did a dyslexic reversal on the word "responsible"? The word would then become "able to respond." The title of this chapter would read "Able to Respond to Self." If you find that "Able to Respond to Self" works better than "Responsible to Self," feel free to change the title.

Being able to respond to self takes on many forms in our lives. There are certain times you need to put someone else's needs first, such as when you are caring for an infant or toddler or when there is an emergency. Unfortunately, there are many adults who choose to function as infants or toddlers and expect everyone around them to meet their needs first.

There is a need to define "emergency." An emergency is bleeding, the lack of breathing, broken bones or the immediate threat of these happening.

If the "emergency" reported to you does not meet this criteria, it is not an emergency.

The ability to respond to self boils down to three things: (1) what is necessary for me, (2) what is important to me and (3) what I need.

Let's look at the case of Ole, Lena and Oscar. Lena needed to move from her house by the end of the month. She desperately needed someone to help her move all of her belongings. So Lena picked up the phone and called Ole. She said, "Ole, what are you doing this weekend?"

Ole responded by saying, "I'm going up to the lake; I'm sitting on my butt all weekend; and I'm getting rip roarin' drunk."

Lena responded by saying, "So, you are out of town." She then hung up the phone and called Oscar.

She said, "Oscar, what are you doing this weekend?"

Oscar said, "Lena, you will not believe it. I have to fix the roof; I have to get the water out of my flooded basement; I have to take the kids to music lessons; I have to sing in the church choir; and I have people coming in from out of town."

Lena paused for a moment and said, "So, you're in town this weekend."

Ole, Lena and Oscar are not being responsible to self nor are they able to respond to self.

Lena desperately needs someone to help her move. However, she does not state what she needs; she simply asks, "What are you doing this weekend?"

Ole is not doing what is healthy for him. He simply chooses to abuse alcohol all weekend and to get no exercise. What needs to be important to him is not to abuse alcohol and to get some light exercise.

Oscar may appear to be doing what is necessary; however, he has taken on too much. It is also necessary for Oscar to have some time for himself so he can relax.

Who are you within this picture? Lena—unable to respond to self because she does not state what she needs? Ole—unable to respond to self because he is not really doing what is important to him? Or Oscar—unable to respond to self because he is not doing what is really necessary?

Lena, Ole and Oscar are fictitious people. But are they like you and me in their ability to respond to self?

Chapter 51

Learning to See Further

Learning to see further just doesn't happen. It comes as a reward for dealing with our own baggage. Not the little bags but the big ones that are bound by many complicated knots and messy twine. Because of my dyslexia, I have learned compassion and understanding for people who are going through their own personal struggles. Compassion and understanding cannot be taught in school; it is a gift you give to yourself.

I have learned to use my imagination to solve problems that leave other people stymied. I have learned to see further by sharing my story with others; as a result, others have shared their stories with me. I have learned to see further by advocating for myself and others. After all, if it wasn't for my dyslexia, you would not be reading this.

How are you learning to see further? Or are you like the two lonely lumberjacks in the following story?

Once there was a famous wood carver. He was known throughout the world for his marvelous work. He was not only famous, but he was wealthy. His ability was extraordinary. Once a week the artist would go to a secret place in the mighty forest and

bring a tree back to his studio. No one knew where he went in the mighty forest, but everyone saw the results of his work.

There were two lonely lumberjacks who were astonished by the work of the great artist. They too were artists. Their work was just as wonderful-maybe even better-than the work of the famous artist. However, no one knew this. They were jealous of the great artist. They said to themselves, "If we could only find the quality of trees that he has. If we could only know the secret place where he goes to find such marvelous wood."

One day during their search in the forest for a tree to create their masterpiece, they found the most beautiful tree. They looked at the tree and said, "Finally, we have found the quality wood that the famous artist has. We now can create our great masterpiece, and we will be famous and wealthy too."

They cut down the tree and loaded it on their truck. As they were driving out of the forest, the tree rolled off the truck, down a cliff and stopped suddenly on a pile of rocks. When they ran down the hill, they discovered a huge crack down the middle of the tree. They both threw up their hands exclaiming, "Look what happened! We now can't create our masterpiece. We will never be wealthy and famous like our idol." They went back to their cabin and spent the rest of the night feeling sorry for themselves.

The next morning the great artist was traveling through the forest. He discovered the cracked tree that the two lumberjacks had abandoned. He examined it, loaded it on his truck and took it back to his studio. While taking into consideration the crack in the tree, the great artist formed the most incredible piece of artwork he had ever created.

Some time later he revealed his great artwork to the public. The two lonely lumberjacks were present at the unveiling; they looked at the artwork with scorn and said, "If we could only find the quality of wood that this man can find."

Have you learned to see beyond your dyslexia or learning disability? If not, you can start today and continue the rest of your life. What is the flaw in your wood that keeps you from creating your greatest artwork? Is it admitting to yourself that you have an issue with reading, writing or spelling? Is it that chip on your shoulder? Is it because you cry easily? Is it because you quickly become angry and full of rage? Only you can answer this.

You have the choice; you can be the lonely lumberjack or become the great artist!

Chapter 52

My Statement to a Chaotic World

Today I will walk with you as an equal. I will hold my head upright and look you in the eye with mutual respect. I will stop apologizing to the world for my shortcomings because I realize that I am not perfect and neither are you, my friend.

I forgive the past; at the same time, I forgive myself. I will move forward from this time on as a survivor and not a victim. I will live the life I chose to live, have the peace I desire and the friends and relationships I deserve. I will view the world as a place where I belong and not a place to fear.

I will not fear the beast within because I am a person of sound character and principles.

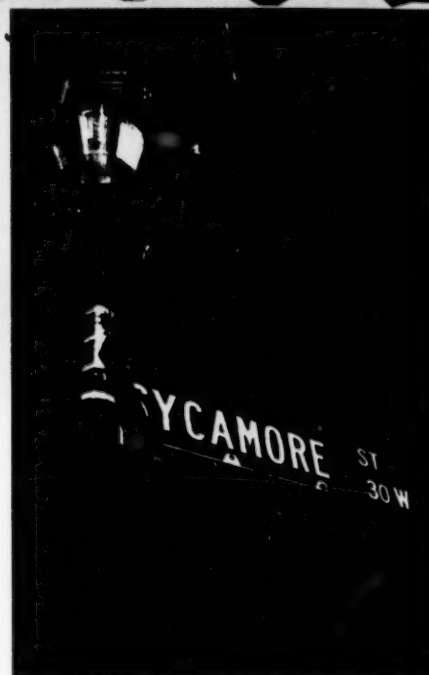
Too Much Time on Sycamore Street:

*A Self-Help Resource for
Adolescents and Adults
with Learning Disabilities*

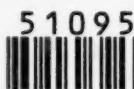
By James J. Bauer

This book is specifically written from one dyslexic person to others. In 1969 James J. Bauer graduated from high school, reading, writing and spelling at less than a third grade level. Today, he holds a masters degree in human development and is a Registered Occupational Therapist in private practice. The 52 chapters—one for each week of the year—are drawn from issues that are discussed most frequently in his lectures, in the support groups he facilitates, and in his correspondence with LD adults.

The author contends that dyslexic individuals spend too much time avoiding certain situations. The mere anticipation of being requested to read, write and spell causes many to launch into a defense cycle which results in a lack of participation in things which could be beneficial.



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